Seeking Christian Enculturation

among Vietnamese Evangelicals

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks enculturated traits which show potential for Christian enculturation in the larger Vietnamese culture through the voices of primary sources (through qualitative research) of Evangelical Christian Vietnamese and the voices of those adhering to indigenous ancestral worship practice. Schreiter's contextual model, through cultural listening, attempts to create overt inculturation keys amenable to the Christian message, but such models have not been an aid to the problems surrounding ancestral veneration rites, which have existed in East Asia societies from antiquity, including Southern Vietnam. The approach in this research modifies his inculturation approach (which is forced to bring in foreign elements of acculturation) to a model of enculturation which seeks out extant traits within the culture by which to bridge to an historically mediated message of Jesus the Christ. To date, no research has been done among Vietnamesevangelicalism within anthropological disciplines (versus theological ones) in seeking answers to the conundrum of Evangelicalism and ancestral worship. A key ancestral worship ritual is examined through ethnographic description as embodied ritual among a representative sampling of Southern Vietnamese in the Mekong Delta regions. This model exposes evidence of enculturated dispositions of filial piety, that is, a filial *habitus* among non-Evangelicals and Vietnamese Evangelicals alike. This enculturated trait may be seen in the Evangelical ritual of the Lord's Supper and aids in bridging the cultural gaps between Evangelical beliefs and indigenous pre-Christian practices. The filial *habitus* and the inculcated dispositions associated with it show potential for Christian Vietnamese communities to develop local theologies as a means of seeing Christian enculturation penetrate into the wider Vietnamese society.

Seeking Christian Enculturation Among Vietnamese Evangelicals

by

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DECLARATIONS

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed  (Candidate)

Date August 18, 2020

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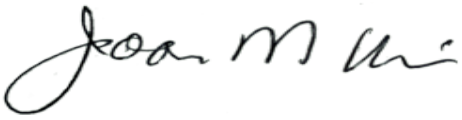
Other sources are acknowledged by midnotes or footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed  (Candidate)

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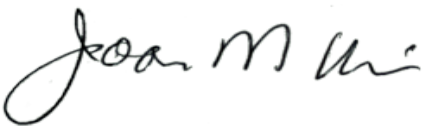
Signed  (Candidate)

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to the memory of my parents, Ed and Joan Wise, who though not able to receive higher education for themselves, were delighted that my siblings and I had the opportunity for such achievements.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF ACRONYMS with TRANSLATION

AV		ancestral veneration
CCOH		Church of Christ our Hope Anglican
ECVN		Evangelical Church of Vietnam
HTBTC	Hội Thánh Báp Tít Việt Nam Kampuchea	Vietnamese Baptist Church of Cambodia
HTTL	Hội Thánh Tin Lành	Evangelical Church of Vietnam
HTGL	Hội Thánh Giảm Lý	Methodist Church
HTLAS	Hội Thánh Lời Ẩn Sủng	Abundant Word House Church
IHCKC		Indigenous House Church Kratie Cambodia
LDG	Lễ Đám Giỗ	Death Day Anniversary Ceremony
LKN	Lễ Ky Niệm	Christian Memorial Ceremony
LTT	Lễ Tiệc Thánh	the Lord's Supper
MS	Mục Sư	Pastor
VNE		Vietnamese Evangelical

INDEXING SYSTEM for Identifying Congregations

C1 Church of Christ our Hope Anglican Church, (CCOH) Hồ Chỉ Minh City

C2 Tin Lành Là Quyền Phép, (TLQP) [Assembly of God Church of District 12], Hồ Chỉ Minh City

C3 Hội Thánh Tin Lành, (HTTL) [Evangelical Church of Vietnam], Gia Dinh District, Hồ Chỉ Minh City

C4 Hội Thánh Giảm Lý, (HTGL), Independent Methodist Church, Đồng Nai Province

C5 Hội Thánh Báp Tít Campuchea (HTBTC) [Vietnamese Southern Baptist Church of Cambodia], Phnom Penh, Cambodia

C6 Indigenous House Church of Kratie, Cambodia (IHCKC)

C7 Hội Thánh Lời Ẩn Sủng (HTLAS), [Word of Grace House Church], Hồ Chỉ Minh City

OTHER GROUPINGS OF CONTRIBUTORS (see Oral Sources)

C8 Para-church leaders (1-4)

C9Random contributors (1-3)

CVK Overseas Vietnamese originally from the Mekong Delta region (1-3)

MC Missionary Contributors (1-4)

Focus Groups (1-3)

NOTES ON THE INDEXING SYSTEM

Due to the continued sensitive situation concerning religious issues in Vietnam, personal names of Pastors and Leaders were not included. Any persons who did not give a full name (often considered unnecessary in Vietnam, as most people are known by given positions in their family line) were only included with their given name.

Contributors are identified first by 'C', + their location + the congregation each was identified with, as 1-7. However, in a few cases, contributors in a certain congregation would introduce me through snowball sampling to a person completely unconnected to that congregation. These individuals are still included in groups C1-7. Contributors are identified as male (m) or female (f) after their identifying number, given in the order of when each was interviewed. For example, (C1-1f) is a female interviewed from the CCOH Anglican congregation in C1. Dates, both month and year, are included in Oral Sources, as well as the number of interviews obtained.

Category Eight is comprised of contributors from Evangelical para-church organizations functioning in South Vietnam. Category Nine contains non-VNE random interviews within the scope of the research. Category MC contains missionary/emeritus contributors, either currently serving in Vietnam. Category CVK are interviews with Southern Vietnamese contributors now living in the United States.

Chapter One

Rationale for the Proposed Research

1.1 Prolegomena

My lifelong interest in Vietnamese Evangelicals (VNEs) stems from many years of working among them, beginning in Hong Kong, then working and living among them in Hồ Chí Mình City, Vietnam, from 1994-2004. My motivation was similar to that of most missionaries; I wished to aid the Evangelical churches of Vietnam in the areas of church growth by providing new avenues for Vietnamese Christian communities to present a more Vietnamese, versus a foreign face, within their own society. Hwang cites a significant amount of scholarship on ancestral veneration (AV) which has emerged in the discipline of social anthropology. (Hwang, 1977:339) Within contextual theology, only two studies have been conducted which contain ethnographic data in the area of Vietnamese Evangelicalism, and neither of these would fall under the rubric of qualitative research. (Nguyen QHL, 2013; Phan H,1996) Theological/missiological studies among Evangelicals rely upon Scripture as their sole source of knowledge in seeking solutions on the topic of ancestral worship (or veneration); this greatly limits one's ability to understand the issue within its cultural context, as well as gravely limiting the results: most theologies function within a Western epistemological construct of religion as a separate category which is inapplicable within an Asian context. (Whiteman1997) The resulting discussions of spiritual forms of worship is often untenable, 'apples and oranges' conflation which does not allow for true understanding of Vietnamese spirituality and religion.

This study relies not only upon academic theological discourse, but upon what Scharen and Vigen call an 'embodied knowing' (2011:30-3), the practice/s of living one's theology in church and in society. These incarnated practices are accessed through ethnography, and can only be heard through contributing Vietnamese voices. This is the

means of seeking out the inculcated (enculturated) dispositions (Bourdieu 1977) that may aid in the formation of local theology. These contributing voices, both the voices of Vietnamese Evangelical Christians (VNEs), along with the voices in greater Vietnamese society offer the means of reducing the cultural barriers surrounding ancestral practice.[1] If the praxis of VNEs 'working out their faith 'is sought as they encounter the cultural barriers, accessing of this knowledge may allow researchers some of the needed understanding for bridge-building across those cultural barriers. These voices need to be heard, for in nearly 400 hundred years, the controversies surrounding ancestral practices have never been resolved. (Martin 1890; Phan, PC 1998) The rituals associated with ancestral practice, the ancestral veneration rites (AV), have been studied and researched from many perspectives, but very seldom, if at all, as 'embodied knowing', which allows for an 'embodied theology', that is, a theology practiced through the body as an integral part of life. This requires ethnography within the discipline of qualitative research. This ethnographic research, seeking embodied knowledge, will attempt to produce, after analysis, elements that may allow for the emergence of local theologies drawn from these primary voices. This research then is based upon an 'ethnographical-theology', for as Wigg-Stevenson tells us, 'most academic theologians would agree that theology is already culturally located'. (2014:3) Development of local theologies within Vietnamese culture require tools for seeing that culture through those embodied practices, and seeing it within the cultural field in which it is located. The end result of this research is not to produce formal theology, but to seek, through the voices of primary sources (contributors), with evaluation and analysis, the informal theologies which are already intuitively believed and being implemented. These primary voices, giving evidence through embodied knowing, are the key to seeking out these theological truths, which in

[1] 'Practice' is used here, as Bourdieu defines it, the 'art of performance' which encompasses all human activity, including all ritual activity, all that entails, and includes the changes associated with 'practice' (1977: 2,5-10).

turn, may show potential for the development of local theologies.

Part of this research problem deals with the VNE rejection of and discontinuance of all indigenous ancestral veneration rituals which expresses the central ethical disposition of filiality (Bourdieu 1977:72) in Vietnamese society, and the acculturation necessary to accommodate to new Evangelical ritual forms. Research is needed to understand whether an Evangelical ecclesiology (particularly the Lord's Supper, the Lễ Tiệc Thánh), can be understood as a truly efficacious ritual act. If the LTT is a truly Vietnamese ritual, this necessitates that it 'embodies assumptions about one's place in the order of things' (Bell 2009: xi) and whether collective dispositions (*habitus*[2]) integrally underlie the ritual. The goal of this research is to provide new understanding both from within anthropological (ethnographical) and theological disciplines for the Vietnamese community, done from an emic perspective, by a significant outsider (Schreiter 1985:)and seeks to look within and under North American Evangelical Holiness practices to the embedded dispositions of *habitus.*Within the Vietnamese context, all Evangelical Christian forms, beliefs and practices originated in the West within the last hundred years; it is quite fair to say that they are still seen by society at large as 'foreign'. (Nguyen, TQ 2012:53) Becoming an Evangelical in Vietnam requires some degree of cultural change, that is, some level of acculturation[3] for it requires acquiring 'foreign religious practices', which seem un-Vietnamese to the average individual or family unit. This acculturation, as taught, must begin immediately and dramatically with the abandonment of AV rites, and means, in the eyes of non-Christian family members, a perceived abandonment of filial piety expressed through those rites which have been integral within Vietnamese

[2] 'Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them'. (Bourdieu 1977:72)

[3] Defined as: 'culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural system … Its dynamics can be seen as the selective adaptation of value systems, the processes of integration and differentiation, the generation of developmental sequences, and the operation of role determinants and personality factors. (Social Science Research Council Summer Seminar 1954)

society since antiquity. Thus, Vietnamese society, including the current governmental regime, by and large, rejects the practices of Evangelicalism.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance founded Evangelicalism in Central Vietnam in 1911. All missionary activities stopped in North Vietnam in 1954, and in 1975 in South Vietnam. It is still seen both by general society and by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam as a 'foreign religion', mainly due to the refusal of the VNEs to participate in AV rites:

> The cultural conflict of national culture with Protestantism continues…this is in regard to the worship of the ancestors. Why does this conflict exist ... the main reason is that no Protestant organization is willing to deal with it…the C and MA [Christian and Missionary Alliance] should pay attention to this'. (Nguyen TQ, 2012:47)

If little or no change has occurred in society at large, missionaries are obligated to both understand why this continues to be the case, and whether there is evidence for, or potential for, any Christian traits, beliefs or practices have, or have the ability to radiate out into larger society from among the small percentage of Vietnamese Evangelicals. If this is the case, evidence exists that there has been impact into society of the historical Christian message of Jesus Christ. Enculturation includes 'the aspects of the learning experience which mark off man from other creatures, and by means of which, initially, and in later life, he achieves competence in his culture'. (Herskovits 1949:39) This may change through transmutative, (in this case, Christian), enculturation which emerges when the historical message of Christianity penetrates a culture by bridging to extant dispositions which results in changes in existing patterns. Christian mission which has not found any patterns of cultures which correlate clearly to the Christian message of the gospel remain imported foreign forms of ecclesiology and practice, making Evangelicals appear as strangers within their own society. If these bridges are found (versus being

overtly created through inculturation[4]) leading eventually to unregulated improvisations[5] which lead eventually to transmutative enculturation. These unregulated improvisations, that is, innovations (see Chapter Two) may aid societies in developing new internal dispositions or collective *habitus*, and enable societies to embrace the Christian message of Jesus Christ.

1.2 Background

Protestant mission was initiated in Vietnam in 1911 through the efforts of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and persevered through its indigenous sister work, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN), which became the autonomous denomination, Hội Thánh Tin Lành. (C3) Eventually other Protestant denominations began to proliferate despite political and economic hindrances. In the last one hundred years, Evangelical denominations in Vietnam are estimated to have grown to as many as 1.7 million people among a population of 97 million. (Central Intelligence Agency 2018) Vietnamese Protestantism (more properly termed Evangelicalism) has been criticized by the Communist Party (Southern Vietnam's political regime since 1975) for being a foreign religion and one that was invented in the United States as a means of subverting political power structures. However, in the last ten years, the Vietnamese government has allowed the printing of Bibles and some religious literature and has given permission, though in limited form, to a number of church groups and denominations to meet openly. On rare occasions, the government tolerates these practices in the public arena, and has allowed several large crusades to be held in major cities.

Indigenous spiritual practices among the majority of the Vietnamese population are rich and varied and are part of the everyday life of the average Vietnamese person.

[4] This term is a neologism defined by Schreiter as 'a combination of the theological principle of incarnation with the social science concept of acculturation'. (1985:5) This term is more widely used in Roman Catholicism. In conjunction with Schreiter's work, I have continued to use this term versus the term 'contextualization'.

[5] See p. 21-22 for a discussion on 'regulated' improvisation (Bourdieu 1977)

This complex cosmology includes Mahayana, as well as Theravada Buddhism, folk Buddhism, forms of spiritualism, the worship of numerous gods, goddesses, saints and tutelary spirits. Padgett, using JZ Smith's theory of locative religion, explains the primary purposes of numerous types and forms of worship:

> Locative religion is a religion of position, of borders, of boundaries, divisions and demarcations, cycles and seasons. The locative view of the cosmos is one in which security and protection are generally the objectives…Chaos is averted by the careful preservation of the rites … in such a cosmology it is important to know who you are and where you are. As neither one will change easily, it is incumbent upon the practitioner to act appropriately. (2007:14)

This explanation is backed up by contributors, for example, Mrs Khanh (C1-1f_Int_2 2015) who said 'you must worship someone, or else you will be afraid'. Note that Padgett mentions 'one must know who one is and where you are'. Just as importantly, every AV rite necessarily includes, as the incense is lit, an invocation to the ancestor/s to return, and must include the name of the ancestor, the person/s calling the ancestor, and an address. Thus, locative formulas form a necessary part of AV ritual.

Virtually all Vietnamese acknowledge, and nearly all believe in Ông Trời, or 'Mr Heaven'. Ông Trời is regarded by the Vietnamese as being at the highest level of their cosmology of spiritual beings. (Cadiere, 1956:26; KS Nguyen 2017:260) At times, the reference may be to Trời Đất, (Heaven and Earth) which may or may not refer to a personality, or possibly refer to material heaven. However, Ông Trời refers, at least by some and to some degree, to a being with personal characteristics. This term is rooted in Vietnamese linguistics, versus the term, Thượng Đế, derived from Hán Việt, or Sino-Vietnamese linguistic forms. (Nguyen KS 2017:259–60) De Rhodes inculturated the term, Đức Chúa Trời Đất, as a replacement for the indigenous term, Ông Trời and developing a persuasive and brilliant argument for such replacement of this term. (Phan PC 1998:164-165) (see 5.8) Ông Trời is not connected to AV rites, but worshipped on a separate altar outside the house in Southern regions. Ông Trời has many personal characteristics: he is benign, works justice, rewards the good and punishes the bad, and controls nature, sending rain and sun for crops, and is commonly called upon in times of

emergency and disaster. Ông Trời is worshipped in the Mekong Delta by nearly all inhabitants, whether one is rich or poor, as evidenced by the altars outside of nearly all homes.

Illustration 1:1 Altar to Ông Trời Source: Wise 03-15
This altar is always outside the home, made of various local materials.

By far the most commonly practiced spiritual rituals are those connected with AV rites and the most commonly practiced rite within these is the anniversary of the death day ritual, called the *lễ đám giỗ* (LDG). (Toán Anh, 1968:40) As one Vietnamese man in the town of Hoi An in Central Vietnam stated to an anthropologist, 'I guess you could say the religion of the Vietnamese is the practice of worshiping our ancestors'. (Avieli, 2007:152) Other religious forms, through assimilation, (acculturation) have penetrated Vietnam numerous times throughout its history; the advent of Buddhism is a prime example. In Southern Vietnam many embedded popular Buddhist beliefs, (*tin ngưỡng)* are commonly practiced, yet, in fact, only a minority of Vietnamese people claim to be

Buddhist. The Vietnamese people have, anthropologists have noted, appropriated many practices from antiquity to modernity; both enforced and selective acculturation can be seen throughout their history. This has resulted in numerous religious and spiritual forms of worship which have become part and parcel of everyday life. (Cadière 1989; Nguyen, KS 2017) Added to this are the profound impact from the forces of modernity over the last one hundred years, as well as the advent of Communist ideology, with implementation, at times and in varying degrees, of enforced acculturations in areas of spiritual practice. (Malarney, 2003:226-34) To complicate the situation even more, the forces of global culture are beginning to penetrate large cities as the power of the Internet and social media invade daily life.

Evangelical churches have developed into a unique, if somewhat isolated group[6] within Vietnamese society bound by ethical dispositions, belief and practices and ethos among the Vietnamese. They are the only religious group in Vietnam to forbid the continued performance of the indigenous practices of AV rites as well as requiring the abandonment of all other popular spiritual activities, as these are unequivocally considered to be idolatrous, in fact, serious violations of the first and second of the Ten Commandments. Vietnamese Evangelicals (VNEs) practice two formal rituals (although some ritualistic behaviour is in evidence in many aspects of VNE ecclesial forms): baptism and the Lord's Supper, described as 'ordinances'; these dogmas are preserved from their missionary forbears. (Manual of Christian and Missionary Alliance, 2009) They preserve these teaching and expressions of ecclesial practice carefully, although these mentors have not been an active part in the southern Vietnamese churches since 1975. In the majority of Vietnamese churches, (in particular, the ECVN, hereafter called

[6]It is unclear whether VNEs may accurately be defined as a sect, as they do not see themselves as separate from their society in any way except in their spiritual beliefs and their unwillingness to participate fully in AV rites. I have defined them as a social group within their own culture. as those who adhere to a specific set of beliefs, behaviours and practices, being both social and religious in nature, and a specific ethos which may influence their worldview. (cf. Malarney, 2003:251)

the HTTL-C3 mother denomination) the practice of the VNE ritual of the Lord's Supper (the Lễ Tiệc Thánh, or LTT) has been handed down with virtually the same presentation, hermeneutic and practice as taught them by their forbears. Slight changes have begun to taken place in terms of presentation of the LTT in other VNE churches, though most preserve the doctrines and hermeneutics inherited through HTTL practice, even if they are no longer such in name.

1.3 Research Problem

Within Vietnam, AV practices long been considered to have a spiritual component[7] and have always been considered by VNEs as being one of the biggest stumbling blocks to the growth of their churches. What this spiritual component entails is very fluid, varying widely from one individual to another, from one locality to another, as well as due to changes during the twentieth century through the influences of modernism and Communist ideological belief systems. The performance of AV rites is strictly forbidden after conversion, for this is considered to be, unequivocally, the breaking of the First and Second Commandments, and a form of idolatry. (Lowe 2001; Phan 1996; Lê & Lê 1995; Lee 1985) It was prohibited within the ECVN Constitution of 1956, (Annual General Assembly of Evangelical Church of Vietnam 1956) although these injunctions are not included in later forms of the Constitution. These prohibitions include the keeping of the ancestral altar, ancestral tablets and pictures used on the altar, (including the deceased patriarch or matriarch back to the third or fourth generation, and possibly other deceased members), as well as the forbidding of all altars within the home to any other spiritual beings. Placing food upon the altar, eating the food from the altar, (*ăn đồ cúng)* as well as lighting incense sticks (*đốt nhang*) and bowing before the altar are considered to be worship behaviour, as is participating actively (versus passive attendance) in these

[7] See also (Ching 1977) who discusses these changes within China, and which were occurring simultaneously in Vietnam due to colonialism and subsequent to 1975, Socialism.

familial rituals on the anniversary of the *lễ đám giỗ*, (LDG), and are strictly forbidden. The LDG is the most common ritual, and practised by virtually all of Vietnamese society, with similar rituals performed on holidays, especially Lunar New Year, weddings, and funerals. The forbidding of the rites is done in spite of the fact that these rituals powerfully define and express the filial disposition (*hiếu thảo*), for, to worship one's ancestors (*tờ cúng ông bà)* is to be filial, and to be filial means to participate by eating the food placed upon the ancestral altar. Smith explains, As the root of all the virtues filial piety has been treated as the actualization[8] of the individual moral self and as the first step in the gradual extension of benevolence from one's family to the whole society'. (Smith 1987:228)[9]

The VNE disapproval of all spiritual/religious rituals, particularly the *lễ đám giỗ (*LDG) previously held dear to nearly all in Vietnamese society raises an immediate question concerning the very heart of all that is considered precious, even sacred, in Vietnamese cultural and spiritual practice. Since VNEs do not live in separate communities, but remain within their extended non-Christian family units, how do they resolve these conflicts? Both sides, Christian and non-Christian, are required to change, and most non-Christians eventually comply for the sake of unity, but often, tensions remain ongoing. VNE Christians respond by finding other non-ritual means of demonstrating filiality to parents while still living (such as gifts of money, spending time with them, and caring for them in their homes). After death, believing parents are given a Christian funeral, and at times, a remembrance meal, called a *lễ kỳ niệm* (LKN) is held, but it is carefully devoid of embodied ritual forms, except for a prayer over the food. On rare occasions a pastor may be invited to share with non-believing relatives. These forms have no familiarity to non-believing family members. VNEs exhibit filial piety in moral behaviour, as well as a form of inculturation of filiality toward one's living parents (*hiếu*

[8] This is also called 'self-cultivation' see (Đỗ 2003:132–142).
[9] This is discussed at length in Chapter Three.

kính cha mẹ). Do these expressions of filiality without the means of ritual expression, allow VNEs able to replace, or substitute those expressions (AV rites) which are 'the actualization of the individual moral self?' (Smith:1987:228) Are there Christian ritual/s that ontologically express the unique quality of filiality that is also efficacious for those beyond the Christian community? Are there any ritual forms providing bridges that show this actualization of a moral self, or is social dislocation in evidence? If Christian ecclesial rituals provide such means, this may allow for, or has the potential for, transmutative enculturation[10] within Vietnamese society.

This research attempts to, through the focus of ethnographic description, 'zero in' on the LTT, and examine it both in terms of its efficacy to VNEs, both individually and collectively. Examining this most significant ritual, idealized by some in Western Christendom to be the very heart of the expression of Christian identity (Ford 1999) through ethnography may provide clues in seeking out Christian enculturation. Since Vietnamese society understands AV rituals to be an essential expression of filial piety, and its expression as a necessity for family and community, do new rituals within VNE practices used by the Evangelical churches, in particular, the LTT, fulfil such expressions? If the efficacy of AV rites lies in the expression of filiality as a moral action, does the LTT function in such a way? Is it simply a foreign transplant done in a sterile, non-efficacious form, or does it have efficacy in its present form provide a means for developing local theologies and practices that may express Christian enculturation? Do VNEs see it as both efficacious and sacred? Do they express and understand this ritual as meeting with the Divine? If ecclesial ritual of the LTT, as practised by VNE communities' express traits, or practices familiar to indigenous Vietnamese ritual forms and practices, would this not make the average Vietnamese person more attracted to it, in spite of the tabu on AV rites? VNE spiritual practices appear radically different from the

[10] See p. 14.

multitude of indigenous ritual worship forms across Vietnam. If this is the case, then potential for transmutative enculturation exists if Vietnamese Christians recognize this and overtly and deliberately promote these inculcated Vietnamese traits, as well as overt behaviours and practices as a means of speaking into society at large.

The missiological outcome of this thesis is to encourage, aid and empower the Evangelical churches in Vietnam first, reflect upon what appear to be imported foreign cultural practices within their orthopraxy, providing necessary background on acculturated form. It is hoped that this recognition may aid them in actively seeking out and actively re-enculturate appropriate Vietnamese traits, thought, ethos and presentation into ecclesial practice. This foreign-ness, and acculturation (in terms of dematerialization and purification) (Keane, 2007) has been noted by various Vietnamese scholars, and indicated by a number of VNE contributors as well. (Nguyen, KS, 2017; Nguyen, DXV 2016; Truong, 2009)[11] That which will aid and empower VNE communities to look less foreign are those genuine embodied practices, that is, symbolic actions of the body that express the underlying dispositions of a Vietnamese *habitus,*[12] then evaluating whether these practices already show internal evidence of Christocentric cultural pattern, that is, enculturation. If God has shown Himself within these intrinsic enculturated traits in Vietnamese culture, and these are then expressed, or may be expressed redemptively, that is, Christocentrically, the means for building bridges of Christian enculturation into Vietnamese society may emerge.

1.4 Literature Review

The works included here are those considered most essential to the research; these include those philosophical building blocks critical to the necessary background understanding, and those from which this research diverges.

[11] Reactions to and rejection of AV rites are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.
[12] See p. 21

1.4.1 Enculturation

Basic scholarship on the area of enculturation is *Man and His Works, the Science of Cultural Anthropology.* (Herskovits 1949) This work, falling under the rubric of modern anthropology, demonstrates how humans integrate into their own societies. His position on the formation of culture shows his rejection cultural determinism and is significant for understanding the similarities between enculturation, and a closely allied concept, the *habitus*, which forms the epistemological lens in seeking enculturation within the primary data in this research. Two statements made by Herskovits demonstrate strong similarities with the explanation of how humans become enculturated through the *habitus*, as he remarks: '2. Culture is stable, yet culture is also dynamic, and manifests continuous and constant change. 3. Culture fills and largely determines the course of our lives, yet rarely intrudes into conscious thought' [sic] (Herskovits 1949:18) His definition of culture and enculturation and humans' receptivity to enculturation through unconscious conditioning are readily seen in explanations of how *habitus* works through the mathematical operations of the brain, to produce a conditioning which makes our current world (environment, culture and society) seem normative without understanding why this is so. (Bourdieu 1977) These processes allow enculturation through transmission to seem natural, and apparently absorbed through unconscious conditioning. As well as assimilating these enculturated traits, all humans are able to creatively respond to and change their social environment, which, if produced as an aggregate, show 'transmutative enculturation'. His definition also allows for the possibility for personal agency (the rejection of cultural determinism) within collective Vietnamese thought, and through creative processes of the collective *habitus,* to modify and innovate new forms of spiritual belief and practice which look different than those of their lineage, forebears, and general surrounding society. Herskovits tells us 'though culture is the instrument by which human beings adjust themselves to their total setting, it must never be conceived as reducing the

individual to a passive or inert status in the process'. (Herskovits 1949:641; Shimahara 1970) Agency is, then is a critical factor in the emergence of transmutative enculturation in all settings.

1.4.2 Christian Enculturation

This research is concerned with any possible Christian enculturation which occurs as transmutative enculturation, and determining when cultural change has or has the potential to occur due to the penetration of the historical message of Jesus Christ causing non-material innovations. (Herskovits 1949:452-459) If agency allows these innovations into society as they connect with appropriate extant patterns of culture, Christian enculturation will occur. This includes any ethical dispositions and/or practices within Vietnamese spirituality and most importantly, any cultural patterns (enculturation through transmission) already extant within general society that may provide a cultural bridge to the historical message of Christianity upon its advent into the Vietnamese culture. Knighton's thesis, (1990) highlights the need to seek out cultural patterns, those ethical dispositions which formulate practice, (called 'traits' by Herskovits), that may be compatible with, endogenous to, or have concurring dispositions consistent with the historical message of Christianity. These may be ethical dispositions, philosophies, or indigenous theologies and their expression in meaningful, often symbolic, behaviours and ritual, all of which fall under the heading of practices, or the art of performances (Bourdieu 1977:1-22) which are already extant within Vietnamese society. This approach is in direct contrast to approaches or methodologies that artificially attempt to analyse or intentionally create inculturation within Vietnamese Christian communities and practices. An approach such as this one necessarily begins from within the discipline of anthropology.

Missiological scholar, Lim, (2015), while not speaking from within anthropology, acknowledges the forces of 'natural accommodation 'which is, in fact, the slow

assimilation of an alien worship tradition (non-selective acculturation). He hopes that this force will gradually overcome the older enculturated traits of the established culture as he attempts to understand the slow penetration of the Christian message into Chinese society:

> Their [Chinese Christians] socio-religious worldview continues to be operative in helping them to understand and appropriate the new religious tradition … With regard to morality, they interpret and appropriate Christian moral teachings in a Chinese way, upholding filial piety and family harmony in the same manner as their former religion. With regard to divine-human relationships, they relate to their Christian God with ideas of retribution and reciprocity, which are essential elements in Chinese popular religion. All these are not a simple mixing of elements of Protestantism and Chinese religion, nor are these a simple acceptance of one religious tradition and rejection of another. (Yip 1985) This "natural accommodation" may be viewed as the actualization of Protestantism in a Chinese worldview. This actualization is not static; it will surely develop new innovations within the slowly changing boundaries of socio-religious traditions, especially in a day of postmodernism that encourages tolerance and accommodation towards new worldviews and other religious movements. (2015:113)

What Lim hopes will occur, through the slow actualization of Christianity, has not occurred through missiological methods, exegesis and application of Scripture, and/or intentional inculturation, but through slow generational processes that are actually outward expressions of inward, collective *habitus*. He acknowledges that 'natural accomodation' into an alien worship tradition (acculturation) working into Christian communities may be the only way to overcome the barriers of AV rites since other methods have failed.

1.4.3 Anthropological Approaches as a Corrective to Rejectionist and Replacement Theology

Most research on AV in the Evangelical world has been undertaken purely within the theological arena, particularly within its subdivision of missiology, under nomenclature such as inculturation, or contextualization.[13] Scholarship done in missiological fields by Western Evangelicalism does not often include anthropological or sociological source work,[14] in particular, ethnographic approaches that begin from within the Christian

[13] Contextualization methods for AV rites abound: see (Lowe 2001) (Lee 1985), (Crump 2010) and (Ro, ed 1985). These largely follow the 'rejectionist' approach, with no attention to primary theology.
[14] Hiebert's concept of critical contextualization is an exception to this lack. Bagura says: 'Hiebert's model offers four steps that the church can take to incarnate the gospel in its new cultural context. These are:

community itself, although recently more attention has been focused on this area. (Dryness, 2016)

Western theological systems built upon an existentialist philosophies assign religion and religious activities to a separate categorization within culture and are not equipped to produce exegetical interpretations (even among non-Western nationals scholars trained in these traditions) (Whiteman 1997) and have no means by which to resolve real life conflicts in dealing with AV rites and their surrounding belief systems in real life communities, for whom the concept of the 'sacred' threaded throughout all activities of life. Asians do not separate the 'sacred' and the 'secular' for all of life has a sacral quality, seen in varying degrees, not in binary terms. (Durkheim 2001) Thus, Western theologies are at a grave disadvantage, and VNE leaders are trained exclusively in Western theology, seeing religion as a separate category. (Asad, 1993)

Much Evangelical scholarship has adopted a rejectionist approach to AV rites, seeing them as a violation of the first and second Commandment. Vietnamese Evangelicalism is no exception to this. The gaps in understanding the purpose of AV rites are obscured through relying solely on a rejectionist theology quickly become apparent when anthropological methods are utilized, and has been criticized by both Western and Asian scholarship, even by those who do not accept full accommodation. (Hwang, 1977:351-3; Lim 2015; Nguyen KS 2017; Nguyen, DXV 2016; Smith 1987) Previously enculturated traits within the society to which Christian mission comes are often ignored or declared tabu. However, new approaches to research on AV rites, beginning within social science disciplines, versus simply theological ones, are occasionally being seen as a necessity, as Lim seems to realize. (Smith 1987; Phan, H 1996; Nguyen 2013)

Schreiter's contextual model from an ethnographic approach begins with cultural

exegesis of the culture; exegesis of the scripture and the hermeneutical bridge; critical response; and the development of new contextualized practices (Bangura citing Hiebert, 2016:3) Hiebert stresses that the local community is truly the decision makers in this process, a definite step forward, but one wonders how often this occurs, and I have seen nothing of this sort in Vietnam.

listening. (1985:12–16) ‘In ideal circumstances, the process of constructing local theologies begins with the study of a culture rather than with possible translations of the larger church tradition in the local circumstance’. (39) He states

> Rare would be the occasion for a community where its theological development could begin *de novo.* As any Christian community grows, it receives understandings of God and the action of God in history from others. This ability to begin the theological process within a community marks its coming to a certain maturity and assumes it has been fed by other local theologies up to that time. (26)

If these Christian mission communities have been fed by other local theologies, thus, of necessity, acculturation has already occurred. The major divergence between his approach and the approach in this research is that Schreiter begins seeking truth from the standpoint of inculturation of Christian mission practices in a community that is now re-evaluating its Christian expressions imported through Western missionary efforts. After acculturation has occurred, I would argue, is in fact, too late. This research will begin from the source: seeking enculturation within Vietnamese society, seeking out possible extant cultural bridges within the patterns of culture that may allow for an opening of the historical Christian message. Enculturation needs to be sought as the means of bridging extant traits (patterns of culture) and ethical dispositions from the indigenous culture with the message of Christianity, as well as a means of the development of ecclesial practices that reflect a true Vietnamese and truly Christocentric epistemology.

I argue that if underlying patterns of culture which may bridge to enculturation are discovered in Vietnamese communities, which allows ‘finding Christ in a culture’, (from Vietnamese theologies, both Christian and pre-Christian), ‘for the purpose of evangelization and church development’, is in fact ‘hearing Christ already present in a culture’. (Schreiter1985:6) Schreiter argues for seeking within three theological concepts: ‘creation, redemption and community’. (40) This goal of this research is to seek out enculturated traits and habituations within the creational concepts embedded in society and culture, including family and lineage. This poses the question, is Christian enculturation seen, or is there potential for it within VNE orthopraxy, particularly the

ecclesiologies of Eucharistic practice (that is, the Lễ Tiệc Thánh)?

1.4.4 Embodied Knowing: Seeking Primary Theologies from an Emic Position

Schreiter's ethnographic approach under his definition of contextual models requires beginning with 'cultural listening'. Schreiter believes this is a more 'incarnational theology 'versus one simply based upon propositional truths from a specific hermeneutical stance of Scripture. The concept of 'cultural listening' is built upon the necessity of such an incarnational hermeneutic:

> To maintain the desired openness and sensitivity to a local situation…the prevailing mode of evangelization and church development should be one of finding Christ in the situation rather than concentrating on bringing Christ into the situation.[15] Without such an attitude, based on the theology of the incarnation, one consistently runs the risk of introducing and maintaining Christianity as an alien body in a culture. (Schreiter 1985:6)

Beginning as a humble learner seeking Christ in a culture is key; however, Schreiter does not offer much insight into the personal, reflexive stance of the researcher in grasping how implicit theologies in a cross-cultural situation can be discerned by a researcher. He clarifies this with a second, more reflexive question: 'how, as a foreigner, does one grow in understanding a culture on its own terms?' (40)

The first step in fleshing out this model begins with the researcher's stance, drawn from Tanner's epistemological framework. Tanner (1997), who argued successfully that academic theology and its day-to-day practice were not separate fields, and must be seen as such; this narrows the divide between these two fields. Scharen summarizes Tanner's trajectory:

> Her critique pointed to the need to understand congregations as particularly shaped *by the world* in order to see how their formative power worked over *against the world.* Help in articulating such a complex understanding … emerged from sociological and liturgical writings on ritual, including the fruitful approach to ritual practice in the work of Pierre Bourdieu. (2011:34–35)

Scharen states, one moves from 'studying "the Church" to "studying churches" or as theologian Nicholas Healy puts it, from "idealized" to "concrete" ecclesiology'.

[15] I qualify this to mean 'Christian, or Christ-like' values, beliefs, practices, behaviour, and thought-paradigms within the culture, which point to Jesus Christ and the message of the New Testament.

(2011:35) The danger of working from an idealized picture of 'church' (and the rituals of orthopraxy such as the LTT) through propositional theologies is reduced by using a reflexive 'cultural listening' approach, both from the researcher's perspective (and *habitus*) as well as the collective *habitus* of the churches being viewed.

The path to finding enculturation within the situation begins with the researcher's stance. (Scharen & Vigen 2011:64-67) This research will seek primary theologies (as seed for local theologies) through contributor's voices (ethnography), seeking 'embodied knowing' for 'Ethnography is a way to access *both* human experience and knowledge of the divine' (2011:65); it aids in collapsing, to some degree, the divide between theology and ethnography. Seeking a means to accessing 'knowledge of the divine' begins by ethnographically seeking out how individuals interpret their Christian practices and actually participate in them. Scripture itself, rooted within a cultural context, while uniquely authoritative, is interpreted from within various cultural contexts, and it needs primary voices (contributors) to do this. This provides the ability to begin understanding how bridge building may occur in terms of cultural context from the Scripture's cultural context to a Vietnamese context. From this beginning new indigenous theologies arise.

Translation models for the purpose of Scripture translation are a form of inculturation which is extremely important; it may or may not be done by outsiders, but ideally should be done by indigenous believers exercising agency. This will aid these new believers to develop improvisations and embodied Christian practice which are culturally compatible. Formal theologies may emerge from these theologies at a later stage by these same indigenous believers. Ideally, outside theologies should not be imposed upon the new emerging church in that setting. Translation models which use foreign theologies are an error that should be avoided; unfortunately, it was not avoided in most mission settings. However, there is still the means of seeking primary theologies by bringing to the fore enculturated spiritual forms, traditions and constructs which point to or may be

deemed by local believers as truths that bridge to the historical message of salvation brought to us by Jesus Christ.

This research then, seeks knowledge from these primary contributors, but does not seek to build a new formal theology from such knowledge. It is rather to interpret the primary voices 'on the ground' and provide a heuristic means for local Christian communities to develop their own local theologies. Within an interdisciplinary approach, which develops an ethnographical-theological construction as an ethnographic approach 'seeing' may lead to uncovering enculturation that may become the means for developing local theologies.

1.4.5 Seeking Enculturation through the *Habitus*

Bourdieu's ethnographic fieldwork, done in a village in northern Algeria, was the basis of his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) and a signature work for understanding how *habitus* functions, which enables the continuance of structuring structures of society and culture:

> Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (72)

Bourdieu expands his definition by with the concept of regulated improvisation:

> The habitus, the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisation, produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of the generative principle while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation…the virtuoso finds in the *opus operatum* new triggers and new supports for the modus operandi from which they arise. [sic] (79)

Those inculcated practices that pertain to and include AV rites, including the belief systems surrounding them, are deeply embedded within Vietnamese society since antiquity, and were subsumed under Confucianism.[16] Thus, to be filial, establishes one's status within family and community. This 'filial-ness' is part of a collective Vietnamese *habitus*, and these dispositions give rise to the structuring structures that perpetuate them

[16] Chapter 2, p. 28-30

within culture and society generation after generation.

Fulkerson describes how closely *habitus* is connected to the formation of enculturation. Referring to Bourdieu, she says,

> As agents are 'socially informed bod[ies]', practices, according to Bourdieu, are a social enculturation…They operate along the continuum of human experience as 'a system of lasting, durable transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions … as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks- durable dispositions that re-externalize social cultures in ever-new ways. (2007:35)

Fulkerson also notes the power of agency working through the *habitus*, which also has the power to change culture, for these 'durable dispositions…re-externalize social cultures in ever-new ways'. In these ways, the regulated improvisations of Bourdieu, through collective agency, produce unregulated improvisations. These dispositions will affect and shape all aspects of life, including spiritual beliefs and practice, and gradually affect whole societal structures within a culture. Thus, improvisations may give rise to, or become unregulated, and genuine innovation (Herskovits 1949:641) leading to transmutative enculturation may occur.

Bourdieu has been criticized (incorrectly) in terms of not allowing for agency in his conceptions of *habitus*. The area of agency is addressed comprehensively by Lizardo, who clarified Bourdieu's work by tracing its lineage through Levi-Strauss's structural anthropology, and particularly through the developmental psychology of Piaget, 'especially the latter's generalization of the idea of operations from mathematics to the study of practical, bodily-mediated cognition'. (2004:2) Lizardo argues that the *habitus* is not only a 'perceptual and classifying structure' (2004:7), but is also 'a generative structure of practical action'. His analysis of Bourdieu in light of 'generative structure of practical action' allows for these regulated improvisations either due to intellectual curiosity, the need for problem solving, (the perceived need for changes in any field) and allows these regulated improvisations to become 'experimental' and, whether gradually or suddenly, to become unregulated; this, then produces innovation, either through cultural borrowing, (Herskovits, 1949:505) or through creative agency. Fulkerson also

noted the creative powerof *habitus*, for, '[it] makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks- durable dispositions that re-externalize social cultures in ever-new ways'. (Fulkerson, 2007:2) Enculturated humans not only maintain cultural practices and beliefs, seen as normative (due to the *habitus*), they also change their own culture and, she notes, these changes, through improvisation and innovation, may produce 'transmutative enculturation' (Shimahara 1970; Herskovits 1949:641) which allows for widespread cultural changes.

Personal agency is necessary for change, and within the current Evangelical epistemology, VNEs must make an overt and decisive change in their determination to leave the ancestral rites and spiritual practices of the past, and embrace new forms of cultural, spiritual practices and rites that are culturally strange and require some forms of assimilation, that is, acculturation. Within Vietnamese society decisions are mainly made by family groups, clans or communities versus individuals; often there is resistance to such individualistic decision. Personal agency of the individual is in play: Do Vietnamese make decisions in opposition to the group consensus? Analysis of primary data must speak to this.

While Bourdieu's construct of *habitus* reveals non-material traits within social settings, he ignores the ontological connections of the valued spiritual kinship connections seen in Asian settings. (Taylor 2007a:19) These social connections, through ritual enable 'human beings in the here-and-now [to connect to] … non-immediate sources of power, authority, and value'. (Bell 2009:xi) His examination and construct of *habitus* centred upon the Kabyle Berbers, who are Muslims, but only alludes to the sense of the sacred or sacred dispositions in terms of the protection of female honour.[17] (Bourdieu 1977:61) Materialist philosophy obscures his abilit to see that dispositions may have further ontological implications, which is often sought through ritual.

[17] Cf. Urban (2003)

1.4.6 *Habitus* of the Researcher: Seeking a Reflexive Theological Ethnography

How does the researcher, coming from one's own stance within one's own field, and bound by one's *habitus*, which limits objectivity in understanding other persons both in cross-cultural or mono-cultural settings, overcome these barriers to seeing and reconstructing what one's contributors see? Bourdieu notes 'sociological ethnography's definitive break between the research *habitus* and field *habitus* [which] would invite a strategic prioritization of the research role', that is, the researcher's voice becomes dominant over the contributor's voices', for an 'organic connection [must] intellectually reconstruct the bodily wisdom of the field being studied, 'between the sociological field and the field being studied' (cited by Wigg-Stevenson 2013:3) Reflexivity is necessary in seeking to bridge these divides by triangulation with other participant observation and primary data, as well as careful attendance to any data from these contributors that indicates bias.

1.4.7 Examining AV Rites within Anthropology

The scholarship of Mauss highlights the obligation of reciprocation, or, gift exchange within AV rites as an expression the disposition of filiality. AV rites, being non-propitiatory in nature, fall within this category. Vietnamese society has never held that one's ancestors have the power to forgive sins, or are in any sense salvific or personally transformative, though some portion of Vietnamese society still sees the rites as a means of obtaining blessings for the lineage's current and future prosperity.[18] Gift exchange is the more appropriate description: the act of giving creates a social bond with a duties of mutual obligation (reciprocity), even with those who are no longer within one's immediate environment. This exchange is bound by social codes of honour that are

[18] The term, 'propitiation', is sometimes used to mean 'appeasement' of a god, or a dead ancestor, but Vietnamese scholars do not see AV rites as a means of appeasement, but as a means of fulfilling the prime, essential duty of filial piety. (Phan KB 1990:24; Toan Anh 1969)

virtually inescapable, and is evidence of a collective *habitus* within the given society. Vietnamese AV rites may be examined in these terms. Soucy's work, done among northern Vietnamese, describes the concept of gift exchange in general society, and within the construct of Buddhist spirituality. The concept of *ơn* is linked to reciprocity, or 'gift exchange', and is described by Soucy regarding its functions within societal practice:

> *Ơn* is a concept that denotes obligation and it is through impending repayment that relationships are maintained (Mauss 1969:31) In the Vietnamese symbolic economy, *ơn* represents the currency of exchange, and possessing *ơn* quite literally means possessing the symbolic capital expressed by Bourdieu. (1990:112-121) (2006:124)

Field data will shed light on how VNEs participate in the LTT, whether as a means of receiving God's grace, or an action which places one in a cycle of mutual obligation, and requiring an expression of thanksgiving (*biết ơn*). Tovey explains this from the perspective of Chauvet's interpretation as a 'symbolic exchange', the receiver, after participating in the LTT, receives the gift of 'living in grace; but also, being in a place of obligation'. (cited in Tovey 1988:109) If Vietnamese enculturations (and thus, *habitus*) are strongly centred on obligation and gift exchange, examining the data in light of Chauvet's construct is an important one. If AV rites are performed within the confines of obligation (gift exchange) or as propitiatory offerings (Hubert & Mauss 1964), this will come to the fore. Are these dispositions seen in the performance of the LTT?

1.4.8 Understanding Douglas' 'Group and Grid 'Theory in terms of AV Practice

The group and grid theory of Douglas is also applicable here, for Vietnamese society functions as high group, particularly as it pertains to one's extended family and clan. (Tovey 1988:8–9) Tovey's explanation of group is comparable in understanding Vietnamese kinship units: 'Group is not so much about the boundaries that delineate a particular tribe, but the experience of social bonding that enables the existence of shared values'. (2004:34) These values (defined by Herskovits as 'traits') of filiality (*hiếu*) of

which obligation (*ơn*) are the central pillars, bond families, and provide 'place' both lineally and in terms of descent. (Avieli 2007:124; Tran DH 1991:25) Grid is 'the control of the system of classification of the group, and thus, an implicit cosmology'. (Tovey 2004:34; Douglas 1973:54–68) Group not only reinforces one's place in the cosmological order, (kinship ties which encompass relationships in this life as well as the world beyond), but also reinforce the social codes embedded into Vietnamese culture since antiquity.[19] Her work highlights the power of the classifications or grid within a society built on Confucianist dispositions, ethos, and societal structure, all of which is built around filial *habitus*. The power of group (clan or extended family) reinforces the inculcated filial *habitus* and its expression through AV rites. It takes great upheaval or crisis to produce the willingness to express personal agency,[20] and to step outside all-powerful 'group and grid 'of societal norms of 'knowing one's place'. Since AV rites are part of both group and grid, great difficulties are encountered in leaving off the performance of the rites.

1.4.9 Defining AV Rites within an Orderly Yang Hierarchy

Đỗ discusses a Chinese epistemology undergirding the pantheon of spirit beings:

> The main schematization of 'Chinese thought' is a dualistic opposition between 'order' and 'disorder' (chaos)… He further argues that this 'basic Chinese order/disorder duality is hierarchical, with order being preferred over disorder like *yang* over *yin.* (citing Sangren, 2003:10)

Linh, (a word of Hán Việt origin, but appropriated, for example, as *linh thiêng*, sacred power, or *thuộc linh*, spiritual power, sits on the *yin* side, as 'disorder'. It is the mediating power (efficacy) needed as protection from danger, mediating power at the boundaries. While the ancestors have traditionally been seen as bringing protection and blessing to the family, their efficacy seems minimal, for *linh* is largely found through other mediating

[19] Here is a good explanation as to why the eldest son of a given family has the greatest difficulty in converting to Evangelicalism. Resistance occurs through both 'group' and 'grid' factors when confronted with completely alien beliefs and practices associated with Evangelicalism, which does not reinforce, and seemingly, abandons 'grid'.

[20] The concept of 'doxa' also demonstrates how crisis may produce change or transformations, both in individuals, communities, and eventually societies. (Bourdieu 1977)

spiritual powers, such as Quan Âm and numerous other spirit beings. (Đỗ 2003:10-13) I posit that this is one reason why AV practice may be seen as marginal in terms of spiritual efficacy (*linh*), the result being that some see it as merely an ethic and tradition, others as an efficacious means of connecting with ancestors as spirit beings. Western anthropologists seem to assume that all Vietnamese believe that the deceased are always with them, particularly during the performance of AV rites (Taylor 2007:15, Jellema 2007:64) Cadiere states, 'the true religion of the Vietnamese is the worship of the spirits' and the 'Vietnamese believe the spirits are everywhere'. (1956:6-8) The few quantitative works available (Đạng Nghiệm Vạn, 1995:357-8, Reimer, 1975:13), do not indicate such a monolithic belief, possibly due to the forces of modernity, for, as Taylor states, 'The increasing fluidity and atomization of relationships in modern society has led to a corresponding weakening in ritual life'. (2007:17, citing Durkheim, 1915) This research also found high selectivity and autonomy regarding beliefs about the ancestors' presence during ritual activity. The fluid nature of and selectivity among Vietnamese regarding AV practices is important in this research, and is important for Christian mission seeking potential entry for and penetration of the Christian message of Jesus Christ. Other ritual forms of connecting with the dead, mediumship (*lên đồng*) and spirit calling (*gọi hồn*), fall into a totally different category of spirituality and AV rites are unaffected by such practices. Scholarship supports this differentiation. (Fjelstad 2003; Endres 2008)

1.4.10 Historical and Cultural Background Material in Relation to AV Rites and Filial Piety

A comprehensive history of AV rites, as possibly originating from spirit cults (Steadman, 1996, Swanson, 1960) which pre-dated Confucianism, was practised consecutively in China and Vietnam. (Taylor 2007a:15–16) The origination of the virtues surrounding filiality (Jamieson 1995) is unnecessary in this study.[21] Over centuries, and particularly

[21] These historical changes occurred across the entire Far East (cf. Ching 1977)

in the twentieth century, changes in practice and presentation of AV rites are seen, as corresponding Confucian traditions regarding family and the social practices have changed. (Jamieson 1964, 1995) Some authors have discussed the changes which were forced upon AV rites since Communist ideologies were implemented (Malarney 2002) and others have recently discussed this rapid reversal (Taylor 2007a) in a post-revolutionary era. Few ethnographic works were done in the Mekong Delta previous to the 1975 Communist revolution, but Hickey's monograph, (1964) illustrates how radical the changes in village spiritual practices are today after the altering of traditional village structures in southern Vietnam due to war and the new Socialist ideologies which were subsequently imposed upon these tightly knit village societies. During the 1990's, mass migration and urbanization began, and these changes increased. Key scholarship such as Hickey's provide correlation with primary data in this research on the LDG.

KV Nguyên discusses dramatic societal changes as Vietnam moved into twentieth century, but believes that AV rites will persist:

> We put forth the hypothesis of this tie in new economic structures because this bond is connected with the world of beliefs that transfer from one socio-economic system to another. We think that in the present Vietnamese society, the cult of ancestors, cult of the dead continues today and will continue to do so in the coming years to play an important role in socio-cultural life. (1994:13)[22]

Other current scholarship also attests to the perpetuity of AV practice. (Taylor 2007; Jellema 2007; Lee 2003) Jamieson's historical-social work covering the nineteenth and twentieth century, explains succinctly the inculcated dispositions of filial piety which have held Vietnamese society together since antiquity:

> Children were made to feel keenly that they owed parents a moral debt (*ơn*) so immense as to be unrepayable…The parent child relationship was at the very core of Vietnamese culture, dominating everything else…children growing up in traditional Vietnamese families learned dependence and nurturance…They learned the importance of hierarchy, not equality. (1995:17)

While modernity and Socialist ideologies have influenced these traditions, (Hữu 2016) the traits of moral debt (*ơn*) continues to be held as the most precious and central virtue in Vietnamese life, as well as its expression in AV rites. The central disposition of filial

[22] His hypothesis, stated in 1994, has been shown to be true. (cf. Taylor 2007b)

piety (*hiếu thảo*), which incorporates the deeply held sense of mutual obligation, constituting veneration toward both the living and the dead (*ơn* and *biết ơn*) cannot be underestimated while doing ethnography among VNEs. Scholars agree that filiality is the supreme virtue and principle of life, within a Confucianist (or Neo-Confucianist) ethos, which includes the Sinicized Southern region of Mekong Delta. This is accurately summarized by Liu:

> Through a close and critical analysis of the classical texts of the *Analects (Lun Yu) a*nd the Mencius *(Ming Zi)*, however, it can be demonstrated that … Confucius and Mencius always take filial piety, or more generally speaking, consanguineous affection, as not only the foundation but also the supreme principle of human life. (2003:1)

Several Vietnamese scholars provide a multi-faceted approach on traditional cultural forms of spirituality, all of which stress the central tenet of filiality within a diminished Confucian ethos. This central tenet, or ethical disposition, as a 'structuring structure 'in a Confucian culture, guide and interpret Vietnamese practices, which centre around familial relations, both living and deceased. (Toán Anh 1969, 1991; Dao Duy Anh 2012) KB Phan (1990), as a modern intellectual, focused on AV rites only as a moral expression of Vietnamese tradition. Jamieson believes that AV rites were needed as part of the larger Confucian system and ethos, built upon the premise that

> the traditional state … was modelled on the family. Religion was the cement that kept the entire order together. The cult of the spirits, associated with Confucianism, was a means to inculcate right relationships within families and between subjects and rulers (1995, cited by Taylor 2007b:11)

This also speaks to grid theory (Douglas 1973), which includes deceased ancestors and the living family held together as an entire social system within the Vietnamese cosmology, and aligned with clan and community. The dispositions undergirding AV rites expressed within and through Confucian thought and cultural forms form the 'supreme principle of human life'. This is extended in many ways to become foundational to all of society itself and contains a metaphysical (spiritual) component. Primary data will determine whether VNEs continue to see filiality as the 'supreme principle of life'.

Much controversy centres around whether Confucianism should be defined as an ethical, humanistic-based system, a religion, or both. This issue needs to be addressed,

for, within Vietnam, AV rites are part of the larger belief system of a weakened, but still vital, Confucian ethos and worldview. (Jamieson 1995; Huu 2016) It is clear that some of Vietnamese society, both past and present, see AV rites as a means for lineage, living and dead, as connected to the spiritual world within a Vietnamese cosmology. However, these rites, embedded in Confucianist thought and values within a patriarchal hierarchical societal system, do not necessarily connote to institutionalized forms of religion.[23] Fingarette's work (1972), addresses this unclear duality. Adler summarized Fingarette's conclusions: 'Confucianism is a non-theistic, diffused religious tradition that regards the secular realm of human relations as sacred. Being non-theistic, it is like Buddhism. As diffused religion it is like Chinese popular religion'. (2014:12) He concludes, in opposition to Durkheim, 'that Confucianism deconstructs the sacred-profane dichotomy; it asserts that sacredness is to be found in, not behind or beyond, the ordinary activities of human life - and especially in human relationships'. (11) Similarly, Taylor describes 'spiritual kinship units' part of a Vietnamese cosmology. (2007a:18) Ching, writing from a Christian perspective, sheds light on both Confucianism and popular religions in China, practices which are often synonymous throughout Vietnam. She believes that Confucianism has always contained a 'sense of the sacred' within its humanism, as well as in AV rites (1993:63–4), as does Chih's work. (1981) Both of these scholars draw strong correlations between Confucianism and a Christian ontology, as well as from the central tenets of Jesus. AV rites, as can be seen, have been ensconced within Confucianism for centuries, however, Buddhism and Taoism have had, in some cases, significant influence on these rites. (Smith 1987; Nguyen & Nguyen n/d; Jamieson 1995) Evidence will be sought for this spiritual dimension in primary data. This is also discussed by Kung and Ching in-depth (1989) as well as by numerous Vietnamese scholars. (DT Vo 1999; Phan 2003; Nguyen 2016)

[23] Vietnamese contributors in this research did not see AV practice as an institutional form of religion.

1.4.11Ritual

Ritual is a very broad and contested category within cultural anthropology, yet acknowledged as a virtually universal human practice. The discourse on ritual has continued for over a century, comprehensively described by Bell. (1992) Ritual study within this research will be limited to how pertinent ritual enables individuals and groups to know, collectively, their place, in family, community and society. Her work provides a concise platform for this research:

> Today we think of "ritual" as a complex medium variously constructed of tradition, exigency, and self-expression: it is understood to play a wide variety of roles and to communicate a rich density of over determined messages and attitudes. For the most part, ritual is the medium chosen to invoke those ordered relationships that are thought to obtain between human beings in the here-and-now and non-immediate sources of power, authority, and value. Definitions of these relationships in terms of ritual's vocabulary of gesture and word, in contrast to theological speculation or doctrinal formulation, suggest that the fundamental efficacy of ritual activity lies in its ability to have people embody assumptions about their place in a larger order of things. (2009: xi)

This efficacy, or the power of the ritual to aid 'in its ability to have people embody assumptions about their place', will be studied by focusing on two particular rituals, one within indigenous practices in Vietnamese society, the LDG, and the LTT as practised by VNEs.

O'Loughlin, a well-known scholarship on the area of the Eucharist, discusses the power of ritual in understanding the collective 'place in the larger order of things': 'Ritual gives form to our lives and facilitates, indeed, creates, interactions at the personal, group and society levels'. (2014:12) He concurs that ritual not only connects humans to 'non-immediate sources of power, authority and value', which is certainly both desired and attempted by those leading and those participating in Eucharistic practice, but also has efficacy in its ability to have people 'embody their place in the larger order of things'.

1.4.12 AV Rituals and Filial Piety

A rare example of Schreiter's contextual model with an ethnographic approach is seen in Smith's scholarship. This in-depth quantitative study was done between Hong Kong Chinese Christian and non-Christian practice, providing background material describing

how individual Chinese Christians, dealing with modernistic worldviews and the standard Evangelical rejectionist stance, have attempted to resolve this by proposing solutions based on full accommodation of AV rites (a rarity among Evangelical scholars). He incorporates three contextual keys: full accommodation, reinterpretation and innovation. However, his scholarship lies mainly within the discipline of mission theology rather than anthropology. He advocates for full accommodation (which would not be acceptable to current Evangelical leadership). His new approach in bridging the divide between Christian and traditional practice includes a contextual key, that of allowing new 'innovative expressions' which required some agency on the part of individual Christians in response to AV rites. However, current church leaders would need to be convinced of the validity of such approaches for these innovations to be utilized, confining the approach to a 'top down 'rather than 'bottom up 'approach.

Scholarship among VNEs dealing with AV rites and their response to it are rare within ethnographic research. Vietnamese Evangelical scholar QHL Nguyen's work was developed from 32 structured interviews with VNEs in two Evangelical churches in and near Hồ Chí Minh City. Primary data indicated that none of her VNE contributors were practising AV rites, yet each one believed that they were each practicing their own personal interpretation of filial piety. She describes how VNEs re-interpret their traditional beliefs regarding filiality in light of the Scriptures, and provides a thin thread of evidence in academia showing that VNEs continue to express enculturated dispositions of filiality, drawing the conclusion that 'the Evangelical Vietnamese Christian concept of filial piety reflects the piety toward God that ancestor worship traditionally values'. Nguyên's work in ethnography is limited due to a small number of structured interviews only among VNEs, with no observation in the field, but her analysis of a VNE perspective is particularly important in that she concludes that VNEs focus their filial piety toward God. Her contributor's descriptions of personal filial piety show evidence of continued

enculturation of the ethical disposition of filiality within the VNE community. Nguyen's contributors not only believed that inculcated filiality is a Christian virtue, but also that its expression should never be abandoned after conversion.

1.4.13 Does the LTT Have Potential to Express Vietnamese Traits of Enculturation?

Do VNE's collectively express their Vietnamese-ness through ritual practice in such a way as to allow these expressions a doorway into the wider society? Since the power of ritual in shaping collective Vietnamese identity (knowing one's place) can be seen through expressions of AV rites (Jellema 2007: 69-70; Avieli 2007; Taylor 2007a:16–19) what occurs in terms of social inclusion for those Vietnamese who become Evangelicals? Do VNEs know who and where they are? (Padgett, 2007) Does the LTT have similar efficacy? Ford poses this question, but in terms of the individual self being shaped through the Eucharist. He points to the 'absolutely basic fact that Christian identity is constituted in and through worship, through a practice'. (1999:138-40) Ford's argument incorrectly assumes that all of Christendom holds Eucharistic practice in such a highly central role. Evangelicalism, including VNE practice, well known for its suspicion of ritual activity, purposely minimizes it. (Taves 2007) Ford sees the theology of Eucharist through the window of an individualistic Western worldview; however, his question does pose an interesting one for an Asian society formed through collective rituals. The Eucharistic event practised by VNEs is also a highly individualized form and presentation (O'Loughlin 2014:191-193) and will be examined through primary data. Does the individualistically structured form and presentation closely conforming to Evangelical, Holiness theologies, allow any understanding to VNEs which may be transmitted into the larger culture?

While evaluation as part of analysis of potential Eucharistic hermeneutics in play is necessary, using Western systematic theologies alone are inadequate, for it is

imperative to perceive and interpret Vietnamese congregants' disposition (*habitus*), which is certainly different from those of congregants from Western backgrounds. Since the presentation of the LTT is, unfortunately, highly imitative of Western presentations, (Herendeen 1975:154) participant observation in seeking out Vietnamese dispositions (*habitus)* is needed, for Western theologies are an imposed acculturation. O'Loughin, tells us:

> In short, Christian praxis has an integrity and dynamic of its own, and this deserves to be seen as a key to understanding what the Eucharist has meant to groups of Christians over the millennia. This approach will strike many Christians as strange, indeed suspect, who, by contrast, would wish to designate the Eucharist as a 'mystery' to be grappled with from their perspective as observers. This reifies the Eucharist while ignoring the fact that its development, both in practice and explanation, has been within the structures of community action and repetition. Hence that legacy of practice cannot be excluded from a study of the Eucharist. (2014:3)

A reified concept of the Eucharist was transmitted to Vietnamese Christians. Without the study of the praxis of the LTT in concrete settings in Vietnamese churches, it cannot be determined whether there are any underlying enculturated traits 'bleeding through' a very foreign presentation of this ritual. Previous research on the Eucharist has rarely dealt with true, nitty-gritty issues such as those described above. Embodied knowledge is sought through interviews and participant observation in attempting to fill such gaps.

1.4.14 Examining Historical and Theological Evidence of Eucharistic Practice in Diverse Cultures

The signature exegetical work of Jeremias on the origin of the Last Supper, (1966) argues that the event was indeed a Passover meal. This is supported by Cullman, (Cullmann & Leenhardt 1958) who produced a Biblical theology from the Eucharistic narratives of the New Testament. Such works provide background for field data pertaining the to the analysis of the LTT: are VNE communities attempting to develop hermeneutics and ritual presentation which is reflective of their own understanding of the LTT, or it is a ritual completely imitative of Western orthopraxy?

Historical scholarship on the practice of the Eucharistic event and its gradual changes within the first three hundred years of Christianity provide the means of

comparison with Western, Protestant theologies and practice of the Eucharist today. Scholarship on the diverse practices of the Eucharist in Christian antiquity and its linear development through Christian history is examined for understanding of it before reification became an integral part of the ritual. (O'Loughlin 2014:191) This research examines scholars who have studied, analysed and interpreted ancient documents on the Eucharistic event in various cultural contexts in the Mediterranean world and Asia Minor (Bradshaw 2009; Alikin; 2010; McGowan 1999; Bouley 1981; Stevenson 1984; Buchanan 1984) in seeking evidence of improvisation and innovations from within their own cultural contexts of the Eucharistic event. Evidence was sought for enculturated traits within each specific culture and whether these Christian communities showed evidence of those enculturated traits in the Eucharistic event. Examination of early Christianity practices in Greco-Roman cultures may also show how those communities responded, reacted to or rejected ancestral worship forms. Is there evidence of Christian enculturation after the advent of Christianity in these cultures in regard ancestral cults, which were normative practices in antiquity? MacMullen offers overwhelming archaeological evidence for Christian ancestral veneration forms of family and martyr cults which persisted until at least the fifth century. (2010, 2014)

1.4.15 The Background of the LTT and its Formation among Vietnamese Evangelicals

Vietnamese Evangelicalism has always followed closely, perhaps identically, corresponding theologies of its founding mission denomination, the Christian and Missionary Alliance. This mission had no explicit, written theologies on the Lord's Supper. The founder of the C and MA, A.B. Simpson, (Bedford 1992) never envisioned it as an autonomous denomination in its own right, but a coalition of Holiness denominations working together to bring the gospel to the unreached parts of the earth and a cohesive systematic theology was never developed under his leadership. Olsen, an

early missionary to Vietnam, wrote a systematic theology that is still widely used in Vietnam today (Olsen, 1958) and a commentary of 1 Corinthians. (1955) Much of this was based on the systematic theology of Strong. (1907) KS Nguyen notes that 'both the outline and the content of the two works looks similar…[it] was deeply influenced by conservative Baptist theologians such as RA Torrey and especially AH Strong'. (2017:218-9) ECVN churches and many other emerging denominations still rely on and adhere to the hermeneutics presented in these works today, and as KS Nguyen tells us, 'it has had a significant impact on the Vietnamese church life'. (218)

The Evangelical Church of Vietnam, (Hội Thánh Tin Lành) simply lists the LTT as one of its ordinances, (HTTL 2013:4) virtually repeating verbatim the statement within the C and MA Manual from which it was originally drawn:

> The local church is a body of believers in Christ who are joined together for the worship of God, for edification through the Word of God, for prayer, fellowship, the proclamation of the gospel, and observance of the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. (Manual of the Christian and Missionary Alliance 2009: A,1-2)

From this definition, it can only be said that sacramental theologies were not present (as seen from the term, 'ordinance') but beyond this, little can be discerned. AB Simpson, Presbyterian by background, re-interpreted his own theologies from his experiences in Holiness circles. His teachings re-emerge in Vietnamese orthopraxy, for example the intense focus on the need for evangelism, as the 'duty to proclaim Christ's death 'which is taught as part of the LTT ceremony. Baptist and general Holiness theologies have impacted VNEs with a mix of hermeneutics, the strongest voices coming from Simpson's work, AJ Strong, and RA Torrey. (Van De Walle 2009; Sawin n.d; Phạm 1973; Nguyen KS 2017)

Holiness missionaries who joined the C and MA were from various backgrounds, including Calvinist and Zwinglian influences (Hesselink 2006:74-92, Baker 2015) and in more current generations, include Baptist, Pentecostal and Methodist (Smith GT 2008)

interpretations. Thus, several hermeneutics should be compared with the implicit or explicit hermeneutics being applied in various contexts, as well as with the BEM order paper. (World Council of Churches 1982)

1.4.16 Contextual Theologies dealing with Ancestral Veneration

A few Asian theologians giving alternate interpretations to western theologies are rare, but CS Song, in his narrative theology, offers a dramatically different response to AV rites and values, and focuses on these as a 'practical demand to fulfil the social and family responsibilities extended to the deceased person'. (1980:154) His philosophical approach encourages Christians to think of all ancestors as part of God's Kingdom, and strives toward a more redemptive picture of what AV practice should be. Even more importantly, he believes that the practice of the Christian ritual of the Lord's Supper may be a vital key for reaching across the barriers of AW with the Christian message:

> With Jesus Christ at the centre of this sacramental experience of life, we constitute together with all the members of the family a communion established on the foundation of the cross and the resurrection…But the Lord's Supper does not stop there. It further gives us the assurance that the loved ones who have gone before us are also present with us through Jesus Christ…The Lord's Supper is the family celebration of life in God. There is therefore no reason for the living to be anxious about the fate of the deceased or to feel the need to provide for their needs. (1980:156)

Song's understanding of how the Lord's Supper can reach across cultural boundaries offers hope for building new Christian enculturated forms, not just by instilling a new set of Christian dogmas, but joining Vietnamese cultural truths of familial and communal ties (love) with the Christian sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Unfortunately, he offers no real tools for implementing such these powerful truths. How would new Christians (who have spent their lives believing that one's moral duty is to perform rituals of veneration) suddenly not feel anxious about the fate of the deceased, or not feel the need to provide for their needs 'unless one teaches a theology of inclusivism? This approach leaves little room for the historical message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Just as importantly, he

does not mention filial piety in this context at all. This beautifully written theology gives us an idealistic picture of what the Asian church could look like, but no practical roadmap for getting out of the controversial quagmire regarding AV practices.

KS Nguyen (2017) moves the arguments for contextualization to a deeper level by calling for VNEs to not only begin self-theologizing, but for a paradigm shift toward seeing the Christian God as the *Đạo* (the Way), a concept recognized by numerous missionaries, particularly in China. Vietnamese syncretic approaches resisting and assimilating foreign religious/spiritual beliefs were adopted, and his work supports the call for what my research defines as 'agency'. While calling for a paradigm shift, he also indicates no roadmap or any practical apparatus beyond this theoretical approach.

1.4.17 Exegetical Theologies pertaining to AV Practice: Pro and Con

Exegetical works on passages 1 Corinthians 8-10 are numerous. These passages are normally interpreted as being prohibitive in regard to AV rites. Fee's commentary, (1980, 1987) and other Evangelical scholars (Conzelmann 1975; Bruce 1971; Witherington 1995) aid in the forming of historical background and context of temple practices in Corinth. Fotopoulos' work provides a comprehensive overview of all exegetical scholarship to date and he examines differing interpretations; though none of these differing interpretations directly impact this research (2002), for these passages do not deal with veneration of deceased family at all. Nonetheless, they are interpreted by VNEs as such and ancestors are associated with demonic beings to whom, if worship is directed, is a dangerous act. Exegetical and archaeological aspects dealt with in the exegeses of these chapters are not similar to the context and practice of AV rites, rather, related to temple feasts and worship practices of specific named deities represented by object forms (idols). The exegeses listed are not directly applicable, but may be needed for comparison purposes in delineating the differences between Greco-Roman temple practices at Corinth and Vietnamese AV rites. No doubt, there are good and needed truths that should be

taught from these passages, but research shows that the cultural and historical context is quite different from those that VNEs are confront within ancestral rites in their own homes. The forms of veneration performed toward blood relatives are done in a context of the memorial culture of the Vietnamese as 'looking to the source'.

No Vietnamese scholarship from VNEs within Vietnam is available on this topic.[24] DXV Nguyen's work, placed within an appropriate cultural context emphasizes that AV rites are not what is being referred to in 1 Corinthians 8-10. His conclusions result in his support for full accommodation. (2016) He also calls for an approach beyond biblical examination at least alluding to the need for analysis of primary theology through qualitative research. Some scholars have come to the same conclusion. (Smith 1989; Hwang, 1977) Other exegetical scholars have provided hermeneutics that are polar opposites of DXV Nguyen's, taking a full rejectionist view. This scholarship draws only upon raw exegesis and systematic theologies for development of hermeneutics and application for Evangelicals who are struggling with the familial duties of filiality. These include both Asians and Western authors, such as Lowe (Lowe 2001), who after extensive exegetical and cultural background studies, presents an interpretation completely forbidding participation, simply re-iterating a rejectionist viewpoint. VNE leaders have historically taken a rejectionist stance, and never accepted any form of the rites (Lê 1971:42-46) and still do not today (Phan 1996; Reimer, 1975) as do most Asian Evangelicals. (Ro, ed 1985; Lee 1985) The performance of AV rites is forbidden by the 1956 HTTL Constitution. Later documents (Hội Thánh Tin Lành Miên Bắc 2013) did not include these prohibitions, probably due to the desire to be culturally sensitive.

[24] Pastors have certainly addressed this issue in sermons and teachings, however, academic studies on this area to my knowledge, have yet to emerge, partly due to the fact that AV practices are politically and culturally sensitive, and partly due to the lack of ability to do theological study in Vietnam.

1.4.18 Responses to Ancestral Veneration from Christian Mission

Catholic scholars are much more tolerant of AV rites, for, both in 1939, and in 1972, Vatican II confirmed that certain aspects of AV rites were benign, and appropriate as expressions of filial piety, in both familial and civil arenas. (Phan 2003:68–71) Filial piety has been praised by many early missionary/scholars, especially the Jesuit missionaries. Even those who opposed it on theological grounds, such as the 'apostle to Vietnam', Alexander De Rhodes,[25] saw its value in terms of familial harmony and identity. (Phan 1998:95)

Western Evangelical scholars continue to debate AV rites from the perspective of whether it is, or is not, a religion within the Western categories of religion, (Reimer, 1975; H Phan 1996) which, as discussed, are not applicable within Asian thought. The average Vietnamese does not see AV rites as a religion *per se*. (Nguyen 1994:13, Nguyen 2013) AV practice is traditionally seen as part of a spiritual cosmology, and scholars are in agreement that Vietnamese tradition dictates that AV rites function as a means of continued connection with family members who have entered the non-material world and thus, contains a sacred element. (Toán Anh 2000; Phan KB 1990) Whether this is simply memorial, or whether the ancestors are actually present (and are present in some sense, on the altar) has always been an area of fluidity. After modern thought became more prevalent among Vietnamese intelligentsia, some scholars saw AV practice simply as a needed social function (Phan KB, nd), and possibly a nationalistic bond which supports a Vietnamese identity. (Đạng NV 2001)

Significant Christian scholarship concludes that AV rites and practices have great value in terms of familial placement and unity (Hwang, B 1977; Reimer, 1975; Martin 1890; Phan, PC 1998) Their arguments are convincing in terms of the need to find

[25] De Rhodes work was subsequent to Ricci, and the rites controversy had already begun. As well, his work focused on common people while Ricci's upon the upper classes, some of whom only saw the rites as an ethical tradition.

solutions to social dislocation, as do this and other works (Crump 2010; Phan 1996; Smith 1989; Lim 2015) which continue to document the lack of Christian enculturation among Asian Evangelicals. Numerous Catholic, Protestant theological and missiological scholars add weight to the belief that filial piety has value within Asian societies in terms of familial unity, love, and collective identity. (Park & Müller 2014; Nguyen 2016; Vo 1999; Smith 1987; Chow 1985; Yeo 1994; Phan 2003; Nguyên A 2000; Ngo 2006)

Martin is one of the earliest scholars (in the late nineteenth century) to dissent from a consensus Protestant rejectionist approach in a Chinese context. He did not work out appropriate solutions but strove with his colleague missionaries to allow the practice to continue among Chinese converts. He wrote, 'In conclusion, I respectfully suggest that missionaries refrain from any interference with the native mode of honouring ancestors, and leave the reformation of the system to the influence of the divine truth'. (1890:631) If he, and others of their time, had understood the need for an emic approach of the local community exercising agency, perhaps Chinese leaders would have resolved this problem within one or two generations. Evangelical Christianity is only four generations old in Vietnam, and there is still hope of the emergence of local theologies through a bottom up approach of hearing primary voices through ethnography, which may 'produce sensitizing concepts and models that allow people to see events in new ways'. (Hammersley 1990:15)

1.4.19 Sacramentality in 'Remembering the Source'

Vietnamese society sees remembrance of the ancestors, under Ông Trời (the vernacular term for 'God') as 'looking to the source', as a sacramental value undergirded and intertwined with filiality, from the individual, through lineage, and encompassing the nation. PC Phan tells us

> The belief in Ông Trời is the basic element in a Vietnamese indigenous religion that consists essentially in the cult of "heaven", the spirits, and the ancestors. At the head of the hierarchy of spirits the Vietnamese place Ông Trời above all deities, immortals, spirits and genies. In this "Mr. Heaven" the Vietnamese see the personal transcendent, benevolent, and just God, creator of the universe, source of

> life, and the supreme judge. There is no cult of heaven at the popular level; the rendering of cult to this God was reserved to the emperor who once a year (since the nineteenth century once every three years) offered a solemn sacrifice, known as Tế Nam Giao in the name of the entire nation. (2003:163) [sic]

Phan as a Catholic scholar readily associates the common term Ông Trời with many traits common to the term 'God' of Christianity, and particularly as the 'source of life'. De Rhodes, coming in 1624 as the 'apostle to Vietnam' articulated a brilliant inculturation key linking Ông Trời to the God of Christianity in his Catechism. (1998:217-218) delineating the difference between Ông Trời as simply the material heaven, and that of a supreme and sovereign being. His nomenclature for the notion of the Christian God included Đức Chúa Trời*,* [noble Lord of Heaven] Đức Chúa Trời Đất*,*[noble Lord of Heaven and Earth] and from the Chinese, Thiên Chúa. [Lord of Heaven]. The term, Đức Chúa Trời was in some way, appropriated by the C & MA mission in Scripture translation and became common usage in the first generation of Vietnamese Evangelicalism. Primary data from VNEs speaks to their appropriation of the term Ông Trời as Đức Chúa Trời, in common speech, in evangelistic efforts and occasionally in academic work. (Mã Phúc TT 2012) This intuitive use of Ông Trời correlates closely to the notions of Đức Chúa Trời. (see Chapters Five and Eight). Cadiere's comprehensive anthropological-historical work also concurs:

> I am convinced that the Vietnamese nation is deeply religious, that its beliefs are pure, and that, perhaps, when it has recourse to Heaven, when it sacrifices to Heaven, it addresses itself to the same all-powerful Being that I myself worship under the name of God, and that is has thus preserved a deep-seated consciousness of that spark of natural religion which the Creator has deposited in the soul of every rational being. (1956: iv)

While he critiques the Vietnamese spiritual belief system from within a Western epistemology, he intuitively picks up the thread of the deeply rooted Vietnamese spirituality invested through the filial beliefs that 'looking to the source' points toward a sacramentality associated with the 'source' that involves the moral and righteous duty of every human, and explains, as does Phan, that this goes beyond ancestors to point toward Ông Trời. Both mention the 'sacrifices to Heaven', which may be the worship of Ông Trời, done by individuals at Lunar New Year, and done every three years by the emperor

as the most sacred ritual of the Tế Nam Giao. The meaning of this ritual sacrifice coalesces as ‘looking to the Source’.

This is echoed by Chinese Confucian scholar Dai Zhen, who writes, ‘man exemplifies or represents the best of Heaven and Earth’… in the case of man, his natural endowments are imbued with all the powers of Heaven and Earth and partake of their virtue’. (cited by Zhuo, 2013:114–15) Again, it is hard to ignore the inference to divine work within each human being, and, at very least, the desire to connect with the source of life, though a seemingly unknown one. AV rites and the ancestral veneration (or worship) is then in some limited (and little understood) way a means of connecting, not to evil beings, ghosts or demons, but that of connecting with a divine, and little known or understood, Source. Zhuo, from the viewpoint of a Chinese scholar, interprets the beliefs of missionaries who clearly saw correlations to Christianity between traditional Confucian belief systems (inculcated with filial piety and its expression through AV rites):

> The missionary critique focused, above all, on the idea of human nature. They firmly believed Confucianism and Christianity shared a common ground, that is, the morality of man. In the Bible, it says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." In this way, the Bible declares the existence of God and of his sovereignty. (2013:114–5)

The Vietnamese beliefs incorporating the sacramentality of remembrance points to reverence for human life, for each human life carries a stamp of the divine. AV rites, in spite of centuries of fluidity in practice and numerous improvisations, as well as, at times, a syncretisation with Taoist, Buddhist and superstitious practices, (Smith 1987; Phan, 2003:132) have persisted, through carefully developed rituals, as a defining means of ‘remembering the source’ toward those who gave us life. These rituals may implicitly point toward the divine for they focus the attention of practitioners on sacral remembrance toward those who gave one life and the reminder, even the command, of the continued reverence for that life, and its eternal value. CS Song states ‘the power of memory is the power of life. Memory is not only a sign of life, but life itself’. (1980:144)

His understanding of the exigency to fulfil one's obligations to those who give us life is also a 'looking to the source', and a perception of the sacral quality of remembrance.

These scholars recognize the implicit ontological truths which are embedded in these cultural contexts, and seek to link their indigenous ontologies with Christian theologies through various methodologies, as Yeo does through contextual theology in a rhetorical dialogue seeking 'commonality and communality'. (1998:15) Marshall (2007) also focuses on a similar contextual approach, with the message of Jesus Christ as a fulfilment of all previous extant ontologies in a culture. There will be cultural traits, practices and/or beliefs previous to the entry of the historical message which may be signposts pointing toward Christ. He explains this method as the 'attempt to persuasively tell the story of Jesus as the appointed agent by whom Jewish (at least) tradition is challenged, affirmed, integrated and developed in love, according to God's plan for salvation and reform of nations'. (57) It may be that in listening to the Vietnamese voices of both those who adhere to the Christian message and those who still have yet to embrace it, some of these 'signposts' may be discovered.

1.4.20 Justification and Placement of this Study

This review outlines those scholars and bodies of knowledge necessary to the construction of this thesis. These indicate the need for ethnographic-theological research, particularly the need to examine potential enculturated traits that may emerge from primary data that speak of Christian enculturation. Developing orthopraxy for Asian churches from within theological disciplines alone is insufficient for finding contextual bridges for members/families/lineages who continue to be filial pietists inculcated with filial dispositions. The failure within the theological disciplines, as demonstrated, shows the urgent need to seek solutions from within the social sciences, particularly ethnography. To date, no comprehensive ethnographic descriptions have been done among VNE communities and certainly no ethnographic-theological approaches have

been attempted to provide counter approaches to ones located only within the discipline of theology.

Ritual is particularly situated to be studied through ethnography, and cannot be adequately tested through theological commentary and exegesis. It must be seen and described through the voices of primary sources if developing potential for 'raw material' for building local theologies are to be identified. This research attempts to provide a missing piece for those Vietnamese Evangelical communities that are seeking to build ecclesiologies that reflect a truly Vietnamese-Christocentric ontology, one built upon the understanding of the unique revelation of Jesus Christ, linking it to these extant traits discussed a means of reaching into the larger Vietnamese society and culture.

Chapter Two

Methodology

2.1 Schreiter's Ethnographic Approach

The research question, described in Chapter One, is one that seeks Christian enculturation. This qualitative research project falls under the rubric of Schreiter's contextual model, but modifies his ethnographic approach described in *Constructing Local Theologies.* (Schreiter 1985:12-16) This approach follows Schreiter's lead in pursuing 'cultural listening 'and examines, through ethnographic means, a sampling of both Vietnamese Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals within Vietnam. Schreiter describes contextual models (versus translation and adaptation models) as those which 'concentrate more directly on the cultural context in which Christianity takes root and receives expression … contextual models are seen increasingly as embodying the ideals of what local theology is to be about, even though working out those ideals often proves difficult in practice'. (12) Ethnographic approaches 'begin with the needs of a people in a concrete place, and from there moves to the traditions of faith' stating, 'no other approach takes the problems of identity as seriously as does the ethnographic approach'. (13-14) Ethnographic approaches work well in examining, from a cross-cultural perspective, the ecclesial rituals of Vietnamese Evangelicalism, its place in Vietnamese society at large, and the inscribed pre-Christian rituals of ancestral veneration (AV) which are prohibited to VNEs. Seeking out pre-Christian traits in the 'structuring structures' of society is critical for the possible development of local theologies commensurate with local traditions, or 'finding Christ [already] in a culture':

> To maintain the desired openness and sensitivity to a local situation…the prevailing mode of evangelization and church development should be one of finding Christ in the situation rather than concentrating on bringing Christ into the situation. Without such an attitude, based on the theology of the incarnation, one consistently runs the risk of introducing and maintaining Christianity as an alien body in a culture. (Schreiter 1985:6)

Schreiter believes that the community is essential to this development, but significant

outsiders may become a 'key source for theological expression and development' (17-18*)*, for outsiders may, at times, be able to perceive blind spots within a community of local Christians:

> without the presence of outside experience, a local church often runs the risk of turning in on itself, becoming self-satisfied with its own achievements. The expatriate, as an outsider, can sometimes hear things going on in a community not heard by a native member of that community. (19)

This may only occur after the specified church is already founded in that community, but may be valuable in identifying areas such as Schreiter mentions, and this research, while emic in nature, I am, as a North American researcher, an outsider to VNE communities. Collective agency, however necessary, for if the local community does not accept this input, an individual can have no impact on the building of local theology.

2.2 Developing an Enculturation Model

This research departs from Schreiter's model in several significant ways: First, Schreiter seeks, as he tells us in his definition, to find inculturation within a mission community that may lead to local theologies. This is defined by him as 'a combination of the theological principle of incarnation with the social science concept of acculturation'. (1985:5)[26] Schreiter's stance of seeking the development of the Christian message within a particular setting (or describing what local theologies may have already developed) from the standpoint of inculturation, is described by him as an expression of Christian mission in a community that is now re-evaluating its Christian expressions that were originally imported through foreign missionary efforts. (1985:xi,1-3) This, I would argue, is too late: Christian conversions and resulting mission communities in many, if not most cases, were influenced through these foreign forms of thought, practice, doctrine and belief. Determining whether this inculturation may or may not exist in order to discern the development of local theology in a particular Christian community, in reality means

[26] (cf. Shorter 1989:10-13)

looking at the forces of acculturation and its influence on the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of the said community. (Phan PC 1998:200)

Schreiter's contextual model from an ethnographic approach (Schreiter 1985, 28-29, 39-74), begins with 'cultural listening': 'In ideal circumstances, the process of constructing local theologies begins with the study of a culture, rather than with possible translations of the larger church tradition in the local circumstance'. 1985:39) While he applauds this approach, he is bound to Roman Catholic traditions that dictate how institutional church traditions must be inculcated into new mission communities. This research, however, is not bound by such constraints and is an ethnographic inquiry into Vietnamese culture generally, and is not forced to hold to certain church traditions which are considered unassailable. Evangelical traditions in orthodoxy and orthopraxy pertinent to this research and the cultural impact on VNE communities will be examined alongside primary source data, particularly any instances of inculturation that emerge when studying VNE orthopraxy, and these will be documented. An enculturation approach differs from intentional approaches employing functional substitutes and does not attempt to intentionally create inculturations within Vietnamese Christian communities and practices. It has been noted that in some areas of VNE belief systems, the forces of acculturation have been at work. This was very evident among VNEs, and was seen as a positive force among leader contributors. Thus, it was critical to get beneath these Western epistemologies translated into VNE hermeneutic and orthopraxy, looking beneath these ecclesial practices to discover the inscribed dispositions which indicate a Vietnamese *habitus*.

2.3 Qualitative Research in Ethnography: Geertz versus Bourdieu in the Construction of the Object

Schreiter also tell us that 'listening to a culture', calls for what Geertz has termed a 'thick description of culture' (Schreiter 1985:28), that is an interpretation of culture .A second

modification to Schreiter's approach will be engaged upon in this research. Attempts to obtain detailed descriptions will be done through the lens of *habitus*, (Bourdieu 1977) versus Geertz's interpretation of culture, allowing a fuller and more substantial understanding. Schreiter follows Geertz in his search for meaning within a culture, practicing cultural listening which he equates to seeking thick descriptions (Schreiter 1985; Geertz 1973) Semiotic clues generate meaning, whether in the activities of life or those seen in spiritual practices, including language signs; these signs are however, limited to conscious, intentional behaviour.

Inghilleri summarizes Geertz's approach: 'doing ethnographic analysis meant sorting out the structures of signification, the established codes of a culture, analytically prioritizing the sign over the lived experiences it was deemed to represent. (Lee:1988, cited by Inghilleri 2005:131) Geertz justified his epistemology, which rested upon the ethnographic texts, as the 'constructed object' by seeing ethnographic descriptions [which] represented a 'meeting of minds', encounters which, for Geertz, always offered the 'possibility of quite literally, and quite thoroughly, changing our minds'. (1986:114) In this way, Geertz believed the written text still permitted an open-ended interpretation of and the empowering of the contributor's voices. Bourdieu's model is distinctly different from Geertz work, (1973), which was based upon semiotics[27] in the construction of the object:

> Unlike ethnographic traditions which account for the achievement of or struggle over shared meanings between or within cultures by positing an objective systems of signs… for Bourdieu habitus demonstrates how social agents can be determined and yet be acting too – how behaviour can be regulated and shared without being the product of conformity to codified, recognized rules or other causal mechanisms. [sic] (Inghilleri 2005:135)

Bourdieu's theory of practice not only seeks to eliminate the mediation of sign and text, but deems lived experience, particularly through practices of the body to be the key to

[27] Geertz defines culture as … 'essentially a semiotic one. Believing … that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning'. (1973:5)

understanding the meanings underlying the semiotic clues. This allows the researcher a means of a fuller interpretation of primary data.

2.3.1 Participant Observation

This emic study of Vietnamese culture, and a group of VNEs within that culture, is based upon ethnographic studies, in particular through the category of participant observation. Scott-Jones and Watt quote Wacquant's comprehensive definition of their interpretation of participant observation:

> Social research is based on the close-up, on-the-ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space, in which the investigator embeds herself near (or within) the phenomenon as to detect how and why agents on the scene act, think and feel the way they do. (2010:6)

Wacquant's definition of participant observation is akin to my participant observation method, seeking ethnographic descriptions, framed by a modified contextual ethnographical model previously described. *Habitus* allows actors to unconsciously utilize semiotic exchanges of encoding and decoding, modify them through regulated improvisation (Bourdieu 1977:77-79) as well as expertly accessing deeper patterns of culture that are acted upon through practice, and which form normative practices based upon inscribed dispositions of which the actor may himself be unaware.

2.4 Epistemology: A Description of the *Habitus*

The *habitus* is also the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent's practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent to be nonetheless 'sensible and reasonable'. (Bourdieu 1977:79) *Habitus*, expressed as 'embodied practices' are developed through 'durably installed generative principles of regulated improvisation' within the schemata, or operations of the brain, through the 'structuring structures 'of societal and familial practices, which produce within a group of individuals a collective *habitus* within fields (the settings in which the agents and their social positions are located). All embodied practices, including all ritual, add to an infinite number of

embodied practices surrounding these ritual spiritual practices (either Evangelical or indigenous) and aid the researcher in identifying the underlying dispositions (or *habitus)* of those spiritual practices. Observing these practices aid the researcher in understanding, whether performing Christian ritual (in this case, foreign forms of ritual) is truly an aid in 'finding one's collective place' in society and ontologically (within a spiritual cosmology).

2.4.1 Particular Aspects of *Habitus* Examined in this Research

The research problem stated in this research is not focused on the conversion experience, but those subsequent changes in an individual's spiritual beliefs, and embodied practice, and if and how this affects an individual's collective place within the group as this individual moves to abandon some forms, or some participation in indigenous ritual practice, (AV) to Evangelical practice, which traditionally places little importance on ritual practice in its ecclesial forms. Does this inculcated disposition toward filiality expressed in AV rites transfer, in some sense? Is there a newly formed *habitus* surrounding the rituals and practice of the LTT which may express Christian enculturation?

Acculturation is required to be a fully integrated member of a VNE community. Thus, depending on the intensity of an individual's pre-Christian participation in AV rites, the individual must accept this potentially radical change. For those VNEs who choose permanent changes in cultural expression by rejecting the AV rites, personal agency is required. The area of agency is particularly and comprehensively addressed by Lizardo, who clarified Bourdieu's work by tracing its lineage through Levi-Strauss's structural anthropology, and particularly through the developmental psychology of Piaget, 'especially the latter's generalization of the idea of operations from mathematics to the study of practical, bodily-mediated cognition'. (Lizardo 2004:7) Lizardo argues that the

habitus is not only a 'perceptual and classifying structure', but has a second and critical function as 'a generative structure of practical action'. (2004:7)

Fulkerson also saw this creative power of *habitus*, for, 'it makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks- durable dispositions that re-externalize social cultures in ever-new ways'. (2007:15) In fact, enculturated humans not only maintain cultural practices and beliefs, accepted as normative (due to *habitus*), they also change them. Understanding the elements of identifying *habitus* in a cross-cultural setting as well as seeing the creative power of agency in producing cultural change are foundational to this research. Critical to finding an answer to the question on if, or what Christian enculturation is already present in Vietnamese society is this underlying one: are embedded dispositions within Vietnamese collective *habitus* reproduced, or transmuted in any way and expressed as VNE orthopraxis in Vietnam? Ethnographic methods using inductive analysis allow primary voices to demonstrate whether collective agency allows for any new habituations, or improvisations on old, indigenous practices, and whether, within a collective VNE *habitus*, Christian enculturation is present.

2.4.2 Dematerialization, Purification and Agency as a Passage into Modernity

Bourdieu's theory speaks to social practices in the object world as it arises from the habitus or generative schemes and dispositions which are themselves the products of this world. Keane's semiotic ideology is a post-strurcturalist theory; he examines how underlying semiotics of materiality may be misrecognized in settings where acculturation is in play. His ethnographic work among the Sumba in Indonesia and Calvinist missionaries, whose (successful) attempts to bring the Christian message to the Sumba inevitably involved convincing the Sumba that practices signifying the materiality of words, objects and actions in the worship of the ancestors were constraints on personal autonomy. To be freed, one must put aside practices signifying materiality and embrace

modernism, and embrace a dematerialized (Western) epistemology for purification.[28] Some components of his research correlate with this research, for a new epistemological construct of dematerialization for purification is necessary to be seen as a dedicated Christian, in rejecting the return of the ancestors, to show veneration to the dead, (seen as the worship of a dead body, for the spirit has departed) and in the eating of offered food, though, among both VNEs and non-VNEs, the offered food is not understood universally as an object of agency. Intentionally embracing this new epistemological view necessitates a form of acculturation which includes the denial of the presence of ancestors at the LDG and other traditional ritual (such as lighting incense and bowing to the deceased), rejection of offered food, as well as adherence to Reformation teachings which consist of a dematerialized Eucharistic practice.

2.5 The Intersection of Ethnography and Theology

This research requires a definitive understanding of ethnography, literally meaning 'writing culture' Clifford & Marcus, 1986), but, which, in post-modernity, is no longer considered an objective tool of description. Scharen and Vigen define it as 'an active, necessarily imperfect and yet potentially revelatory process of meaning-making … intertwined with power dynamics'. (2011:16) Particularly in cross-cultural research projects such as this one, as a white, foreign missionary coming from a North American culture, the divide in terms of the dynamics of power are significant. Scharen and Vigen describe four qualities that the researcher should attempt to incorporate: humility amidst sustained attentive and careful observation,[29] reflexivity: self-critical awareness and accountability, collaborative, embodying a conversation among numerous and varied voices, and audacity: 'be[ing] bold enough to claim that the work reveals truth-albeit partial-but nonetheless real and significant'. (2011:16–24) The revealed truth is, in fact,

[28] Keane states 'LaTour defines purification as the drive to draw a clear line between human and non-human, between the world of agency and that of natural determinism'. (Keane, 2007:7)
[29] Or, 'cultural listening' as defined by Schreiter (18).

a form of 'primary theology', such research be[ing] transformative-perhaps even redemptive'. (25)

2.5.1 Reflexivity: Self-critical Awareness and Accountability: The Theological-Ethnographer within the Contributors' Field

How does a researcher mediate one's own interpretation and produce ethnographic texts? Is it possible to construct texts which go beyond a representation of what contributors share? Some have questioned this, in terms of the 'construction of the object '(the written, interpreted text), but Bourdieu, himself an ethnographer, says:

> to describe the process of objectification and orchestration in the language of interaction and mutual adjustment is to forget that the interaction itself owes its form to the objective structures which have produced the dispositions of the interacting agents and which allot them their relative positions in the interaction and elsewhere. (1977:83)

'Elsewhere' means, of course, outside of the interaction, for example, interpreted in a text. Thus, Bourdieu sees these objective structures (embedded with the dispositions of both researcher and contributor) allowing for an adequate interaction to take place, and for this interaction to be recorded appropriately in textual form.

It becomes clear that the *habitus* of the ethnographer limits his objectivity in understanding why and how cultures may look radically different from one's own. These limitations must be taken into account. The individual's set of habituations defines one's epistemology until other cultures, or beliefs, are presented to, or clash with one's own. Confronted with this, humans assimilate, accommodate, or reject these differences. Working cross-culturally, the researcher, I posit, is much more aware of these limitations (in comparison to one's own culture, where it can be assumed no such division exists) due to the continuous realization of cultural gaps. The researcher is always aware of being in a very foreign culture, and therefore, takes more care. There is an automatic distance

from her contributors, even while working within the same field.[30] Producing the texts appropriately indicates that the researcher has practised reflexivity within identified fields, as well as a proper reflexivity in understanding the contributor's perception of the researcher's stance (whether seeing the researcher as either missionary, foreign guest, researcher, friend, acquaintance, or 'curious stranger') while knowing one's own stance as interviews are produced in participant settings. Working within these confines, with continued reflexivity (in thought processes and note-taking) data can be evaluated and analysed comfortably if done in careful triangulation with the body of data and in correlation with secondary sources. The scholarship of (Shon1983) (Scott-Jones & Watt 2010:148–150), and (Wigg-Stevenson 2014) were particularly useful in the development of my skills in developing reflexivity as a researcher.

A small amount of ethnographic inquiry was done in the researcher's personal ministry setting, C6. Two of these contributors (C5-1f, C6-1f) were both under my direction either as staff personnel or as a local church planter. Wigg-Stevenson's work aided in developing reflexive processes in these areas. (Wigg-Stevenson 2013) A 35-year-old female, along with her family (Sambath, C61f) was planting a house church in Eastern Cambodia. (C6) I suggested that the family perform a Lễ Kỷ Niệm, (LKN) a Christian ceremony, to remember her paternal grandparents, neither of whom had heard the gospel message during their lifetimes, and encouraged them to perform the LTT in a more Cambodian style. They carried out this these rituals of their own initiative while I was not present and recorded them with several photos. Mr Đen (C6-1m) had complete control of the LKN ritual and used materials from the HTTL Evangelical church of Vietnam to aid them. The LTT, done immediately after the LKN ritual was performed was also arranged and carried out among Cambodian converts in the church in a

[30] Defined as a 'network, structure or set of relationships which may be intellectual, religious, educational, cultural, etc'. (Navarro 2006:18)

Cambodian home and done exclusively under their direction. For these reasons, I concluded that the desire and initiative for this came from the contributors themselves and they carried this out in a neutral setting, and could be utilized as credible data.

Reflexive processes related to pertinent data were recorded in journals (Journal 1-8); including reflexive notes along with observation, methodological and theoretical notes. In particular, reflexive methods were used in understanding the Vietnamese relationships with foreigners (*người nước ngoài*). This entailed careful diplomacy on my part, in terms of using neutral questions and several times, getting around their questions on what 'other people had said'. (Khanh, C1-1f) Reflexivity was needed here; however, my long-term experience living on-site for ten years with Vietnamese people came to my aid.

Among VNEs, the concept of 'missionary' is a powerful one, while among non-VNEs, this concept has virtually no relevance. However, when identifying myself as an American, in some cases, behaviour would indicate admiration and a desire to please. Questions could be asked about my lifestyle, my salary, and lead to discussion of relatives or friends who had immigrated to the United States. This could have effect upon the outcome of the interviews, and occasions were recorded when there were suspicions that the contributor was attempting to answer in a manner which 'pleased a foreigner' or 'pleased a missionary', or, (in the case of VNEs), was struggling to put together an answer which 'sounded Christian'. In the great majority of interviews, contributors were unhesitating in their responses, obviously expressing genuine convictions which they had no reason to hide or edit for me. In some cases, there was a relationship and sympathetic feelings between myself and the contributor. This benefited the interview in every case.

Among non-VNEs issues of personal religious beliefs were not seen as controversial and could be classed under the rubric of 'Vietnamese culture' which people generally enjoyed discussing. It was notable that a number of non-VNEs expressed a

highly tolerant opinion of religious practices of those with whom they did not agree. (C4-6m; C4-9f; C6-11m,f 2015; C9-1f) When the contributor was a non-VNE, I had to be very careful to conceal my own personal beliefs in regard to Christianity, at times refraining from sharing points that might, in my estimation, encourage the person toward Christian faith. My justification for not fulfilling a Christian duty was that the person being interviewed had at least one Christian family member who would have long-term contact with this person.

2.6 Qualitative Research Methods: Participant Observation

In the role of participant-observer, (Scott-Jones & Watt 2010:107-55) semi-structured interviews were used to produce knowledge in the areas of spiritual practice for both VNEs and non-Evangelicals. Categories emerged from such broad questions (broken down into sub-questions regarding their family situations, their spiritual practices, and so forth). How well socially-located do VNEs remain in their larger, non-Christian society in terms of cultural practices, that is, are VNEs 'comfortable in their own skin?' Are they severely marginalized within society, and by their families? How have they maintained their strict prohibitions that are taught as part of church dogma in regard to forbidding all AV rites and other non-Christian spiritual practices? Have VNEs maintained their status with their families? Is social dislocation in evidence? This may be examined in terms of group and grid theory. (Douglas 2003) Vietnamese culture is both high grid and high group. Thus, in a hierarchical societal system, spiritual practices, such as lighting incense (usually done by the eldest son) are extremely important, for as Tovey, explaining grid-group states, 'the grid-group model suggests that those who live in a society with a weak grid, weak group model … have a weak apprehension compared to those of strong grid-group cultures'. (1988:9) Since VNEs come from a background in which symbols (such as burning incense) are efficacious, how does this affect those new converts to Evangelicalism? Do these prohibitions influence their practice of the LTT? Do all VNEs

keep these strict prohibitions? What is the purpose of the LTT seen through the eyes of contributors and leaders? What does it mean to an individual contributor, whether a leader or a layperson in the congregation? What is its role in the church setting (both individually and communally)? Since joining the Christian community, have attitudes toward indigenous ancestral practices changed, and how? In comparison with familial AV rites, do new believers feel a genuine part of the new Christian family/community? Do previously held pre-Christian beliefs continue to influence their orthopraxy in general? How sacred is the LTT for VNEs? Do VNEs feel they are in a place of obligation toward God as they perform the LTT? Do issues of sin and judgment come into play when partaking of the LTT? Do VNE's view of pre-Christian ritual practices and dispositions affect their understanding of the LTT?

Non-VNEs contributors (non-Christians) were asked to describe both broadly and specifically, spiritual, religious and familial practices, especially in pertaining to the AV cult, and their beliefs in regard to the afterlife of the deceased ancestors. They were also asked to describe any other spiritual beliefs they subscribed to, which were numerous. Permission was gained to attend various gatherings in homes, temples, and the communal temple *(đình)*. Some of the questions asked were informational, but, as participant observer, I was able to see how their descriptions fit into the familial, communal and societal contexts. Many of these contributors, often without being asked, would describe situations in their lives, as well as familial relationships, social and communal ritual and practice, and how these were joined, often seamlessly, with familial traditions, beliefs and gatherings.

Detailed ethnographic descriptions were sought from a both a participant and an observer stance. (Watt and Jones, 2010:125-155) These stances are described as: 'observer-as-participant' and 'participant-as-observer'. (Watt and Jones, 2010:111; Angrosino 2007; Bryman 2008) My role as participant-observer was as Wacquant

described

> Social research is based on the close-up, on the ground, observation of people and institutions in real time and space in which the investigator embeds herself near or within the phenomenon so as to detect how and why agents on the scene act, think, and feel the way they do. (2003:5)

2.6.1 Data Collection: Purposeful and Random Sampling

A representative sampling was obtained through semi-structured interviews from 80 contributors in the Mekong Delta or Southern region, one from a North Vietnamese expatriate, as well as three Focus Group summaries, which were all transcribed on an I Pad device into the Audio Note application. Sets (C1-C7) of interviews are from seven different locations, each location including a VNE congregation. I was acquainted with three of the key contributors, two of whom I had worked with in a ministry setting for some time, however, family members were unknown to me in nearly all settings. Four interviews were obtained from para-church leaders, (C8,1-4), one of whom was a friend. Three random interviews were obtained (C9, 1-3); two of these were complete strangers who were willing to be interviewed, and one was an acquaintance that I had met twice. I had no connections with their families, and I was not aware of their spiritual beliefs when I interviewed each of them. Category 10 were missionaries, (C10, 1-4) either emeritus, or currently on the field in Vietnam. Category (CVK 1-4) were Vietnamese expatriates living in the United States. (see Primary Sources)

Family ties were the most important factor in obtaining the greatest number of interviews. Key contributors introduced me to their family members whom I had never met. The other method was to ask the pastor of one of the seven congregations followed, and all seven pastors were willing to introduce me to congregants. This was the main method for meeting willing contributors. In some cases, I met individual contributors at church gatherings directly. Most were very agreeable, and, in some cases, eager to be interviewed. VNEs enjoy talking about their faith, their beliefs and their testimonies. Interviews were done among individuals within six extended family units, each family having one or more VNE member. (C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6) In the final category, (C7) I

was able to interview the pastor and his wife, but no other family members (C7-1m,1f), and two congregants. (C7-3m) (C7-4f) The seven categories all included an Evangelical congregation, each one of different denominational stance: Anglican, (CCOH-C1) C2-Assembly of God, (HTQP-C2) Evangelical Church of Vietnam, (HTTLC-3), Independent Methodist, (HTGL-C4) Southern Baptist Vietnamese Church of Cambodia, (HTBVN-C5), indigenous house church in Eastern Cambodia, (IHCKC-C6) and independent charismatic house church (HTLAS-C7), Hồ Chí Minh City. (see Indexing System for Identifying Congregations, p. ix-x)

2.6.2 Framing the Interview Questions

Interviews were semi-structured, which allowed more freedom to explore the themes listed above. This has, however, the disadvantage of the uneven results. In a few cases, the interviewee was not really interested in the topic at hand and would simply divert to another topic. Talking with a foreigner is still something of a novelty to many Vietnamese, and one who speaks their language is very rare. So, it was not uncommon for the person being interviewed to change the topic to discussions of travel to the United States, describe a visit, or tell a story of a relative or friend who currently lived there. At times, not all questions were asked as I could tell that the person was weary, or busy.

During semi-structured interviews and in natural settings, contributors covered numerous topics, often describing the difficulties and suffering of life, in particular, poverty (the most common topic), domestic violence (discussed by women), loss, wartime (discussed by two older men), marriage and familial ties within and as part of ritual (seen as extremely important), work, and tolerance for other religious belief systems. Striking by its absence was discussion of political topics, which in light of oppressive political policies, was certainly natural. The pragmatic thinking and practical ‘can-do’ attitude seen as common to Vietnamese culture also came through clearly in many interviews.

2.6.3 Guidelines for Interview Questions

VNEs are taught to 'tell their testimony' soon after becoming a Christian; in fact, this practice is one of the ritualistic practices attributed to them as a group. I often asked them to share their testimony, as it was easy and familiar for them. During this, I could often glean much information about their family background, the family ethos and traditions, and their stance on AV practices. These testimonies also added context in terms of understanding their convictions regarding the LDG ritual, and varied greatly, however, several of them had dramatic testimonies which indicated God's miraculous intervention, even avoidance of death. For example, one man had tried to hang himself, but when the rope broke, he heard the gospel message while in the hospital, and repented immediately. (C4-1m) Another had fallen into an abandoned well and counted it miraculous that someone in this remote rural area heard him and came to get him out. (C4-7m) One came to faith simply by reading a New Testament. (C4-15m) Others came to faith gradually over a period of time. Dramatic, even miraculous events strongly indicated to some contributors that God Himself was working in the individual's life; this was seen as greatly desirable. These testimonies additionally aided my research in understanding how each viewed the significance of ecclesial practices, in particular, the LTT in their lives, and whether these practices gave evidence of habituated dispositions which would indicate Christian enculturation. These testimonies also showed how each one negotiated their allegiance to a new belief system and practice, and the abandonment of AV rites, which occurred in each case. However, during this testimony, Vietnamese indigenous customs might also be interpreted in a very negative light, as they gave credence to the VNE tabu on AV rites and all other indigenous practice.

More specific questions were asked after this, and at times could include many topics relating to spiritual activity, practice and belief. I attempted to form questions that did not imply moral judgments or have any prescriptive bias, and had to restrain myself

when a contributor would request my opinion. On at least one occasion, a contributor, who, understanding that I was doing research, would ask me how other contributors answered a question. Diplomacy was required here to discern how much and how much not to say. These skills are learned through practice.

Of particular importance was the relational component in obtaining a good interview: I consistently noted that the closer I was to a person in terms of either friendship, or friendship with their family, the easier it was to obtain more detailed, nuanced and 'straight talk'. The person would relax and begin to tell me what he/she truly thought and felt, versus a polite or expected response. Vietnamese value friendship and trust, thus the more intimate the relationship, the more one could expect a more straightforward and uninhibited response. This was more prevalent while interviewing VNEs, particularly if they understood my missionary position.

Non-VNEs were usually very willing, and often felt honoured, to be interviewed. A very few non-VNEs (particularly older men) were not enthusiastic about an interview, in a few cases, I simply passed over these and looked for more amenable ones. Men usually gave briefer interviews than women. However, there was no fear, guilt or embarrassment as each one expressed personal belief with an outsider such as myself. There were no hesitations in explaining deeply embedded spiritual practice. As an outsider to their cultural practices, it was both acceptable and desirable to ask questions about Vietnamese culture, and they were happy to comply. Within VNE communities, my position as a white, American missionary, an acquaintance, stranger or friend brought slight uncertainty to the interview ('why would this person wish to interview me?', 'what of value do I have to say?' and 'am I giving the correct Christian response?' were all unspoken questions which I could intuitively discern as I spoke with them). However, as soon as the ice was broken, I found that most enjoyed the questions and were happy to bring as much to the process as he could. In one case, a female rural dweller had a difficult

time articulating what she wanted to say. (Gái, C5-4f) However, in being with the family and seeing the rituals performed by her (these included offerings to Quan Âm, and Ông Trời) aided in understanding and filling in the gaps what was not well articulated.

2.6.4 Inductive Analysis: The Ethnographer as an Interpreter of Culture

Raw data was coded with NVivo software, which aids in evaluating specific terms used, but analysis of content is still largely reliant on the researcher's inductive and interpretative decision-making processes in determining in which thematic category and code in which the datum is filed. Final interpretation comes from the researcher's collection and interpretation of data, inclusive of behaviour and practices, seen within the familial, communal, and societal context.

The epistemological lens of *habitus* comes into play, for this allows for understanding beyond the articulated behaviour (the interview) to responses, governed by inculcated dispositions expressed as embodied practices (rituals). Other necessary contextual information was obtained within the societal context of the contributors, (and for this reason location was of importance); these methods revealed collective dispositions which indicate *habitus.* (Bourdieu 1977 :70–83)

2.6.5 Framing the Results of the Data

Scott-Jones and Watt offer the proper solution of the criticisms of ethnographic description: 'the final stage of data analysis is the framing of analysis with theory ... Ethnography without a theoretical framework is just description- a key criticism of ethnographic work'. (2010:163) The contextual ethnographical model of Schreiter provides the basic theoretical framework for this research, the modifications put in place in this research frame it as an enculturation model. (1.2)

2.6.6 Participant Observation

I took the role of a participant observer (Scott-Jones & Watt 2010:107–155) in numerous

family and holiday gatherings as well as numerous religious ceremonies with these individuals and their families, both Christian and non-Christian. I followed these families in a participant observer role as part of numerous events, and services. This allowed a more unrestricted view into actual practices, and provided a measure of triangulating with interview material, as well as with on-site observation of rituals and ceremonies, photographs (Illustrations p. vii) and recording videos. (Location C1-C7V, Oral Sources) Progress was acquired for needed skills in interviewing contributors, as well as other developing skills, such as reflexivity. Reflective questions were recorded, as well as reflexive note taking related to the process as learning was acquired during the interviews in Journals (J1-J8), (Primary Sources) as well as the development of my relationships with a number of the contributors. Those that I was, or became acquainted with (five women and one man), were willing to be interviewed several times, and I was able to spend time with their families in various situations. While this could limit one's ability to see and interpret if there is not a wide enough range of data from other contributors, with 80 other interviews, a larger representative sampling is obtained, and these limitations are off-set. This allows any biases from these six contributors to be overcome. Without other contributions being given, bias would be present, especially if there were no non-VNE voices in the mix, particularly from the six family units. In Categories 1-6, both VNE and non-VNE voices of extended family members gave interviews. Often a non-VNE family member (a non-Christian), would give an opinion at complete variance to what the VNE contributor had told me, at times while they were sitting together. In every case, extremely different belief systems were tolerated and respected. In one case, a contributor (C3-6f) strongly disagreed with her sister-in-law's viewpoint, but she said, 'it wasn't what she said, but the way she said it'. Her sister-in-law (C3-1f), was sitting beside her as she said this. Families with opposing opinions were not afraid of displeasing the interviewer.

In an immersed setting (normal societal and familial settings) it would be nearly

impossible to give equal time to each contributor; this would only have been possible if the interviews were structured, which only allows very narrow scope in data. These contributors, each labelled as '1' in their respective category, were (C1-1f), (C2-1f), (C3-1f), (C4-1m), (C5-1f), and (C6-1f). These became key contributors simply due to 1) their willingness, 2) their desire to introduce me to their families, and, 3) their availability. (Bernard, 2006:166-67) Bias in their choices of family members was not apparent, as this occurred due to random availability, happenstance meetings at family gatherings, and the key contributor's desire to allow me choose whomever I felt appropriate. These key contributors, both male and female, were able to lead me to family members, both VNE and non-VNE. Without willing key contributors, it is unlikely that I would have been able to do participant observation among 'split' families, that is those who were made up of both VNE and non-VNE members). In an Asian context social norms limit focusing on and following male contributors in terms of friendship, but I was able to spend enough time within family units to counteract the deficiencies in meeting male contributors.

2.6.7 Eleven Components of the Corpus of Primary Data and its Development

Eleven different components were needed as building blocks to establish the needed framework for properly obtaining, evaluating and analysing primary data. I took the role of participant observer in attending seven ceremonies of the LDG in two settings and the LTT in six diverse Evangelical congregations, and was present on numerous occasions. Videos (NVivo Set C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C7, LTT) of each of the LTT ceremonies and one LDG ceremony were recorded. (C5-Video-LDG, Facebook Messenger Accessed 16-05-16) I was participant-observer at various familial and cultural events, such as Lunar New Year (C1, C3) an engagement party, (C1) and other simple family gatherings on a number of occasions. Participant-observation included visiting these specified members in their homes, with their families, as well as an event at a community *đình* (temple) (C1) and in various other venues, as recorded in Journals C1-C8, Interviews, Oral and Primary

Sources.

The second component in correlating data was the researcher (myself) as participant-observer, in both Christian and non-Christian settings, based on my recorded observations and reflections in Journals (J1-J8), photographs, and in video format. (Primary Sources) In most instances, I was a fully embedded participant, and was able to contribute data drawn from my personal experiences in the churches and venues visited. The third component in building the framework in analysing data was through semi-structured interviews, done among 82 contributors, who were chosen through purposeful sampling. (Patton 2001:108) I obtained a representational sampling among seven family units; six of these were extended family units. (Categories C1-C6) Some were VNEs and some were not.

Criteria for selecting VNEs was determined by the number of years since conversion, VNEs who were the only Christian within a family unit, whether or not the individual was in ministry or leadership position in her church (one or two leaders were interviewed in each category), including VNEs of very recent conversion, moving in a continuum up to and including several who were born into a VNE family) were interviewed. Family members of VNEs were chosen mainly through purposeful, but occasionally, random sampling. In Category 6, the villages of Trà Vinh and Trà Cú, in Sóc Trang province, an area populated with ethnic Cambodian, and Vietnamese-Cambodian families. Mr Đen's (C6) extended family members were interviewed randomly according to availability and the contributors' amenable attitude.

Six contributors became key contributors. (Bernard, 2006196) In Category One, for example, a young believer, a middle aged female (C1-1f), whom I met randomly at the Anglican Church of Hồ Chi Minh City (CCOH-C1), contributed to my research through several interviews, as well as inviting me to attend family gatherings and a number of church gatherings, and also contributed to general questions on culture as

needed. I interviewed several family members, including her parents. She, as well as five others, were willing to spend many hours in aiding me through interviews, visiting their homes and churches, and bringing me to various ceremonies and rituals. These contributors were extremely important, for, without the relationship I developed with them, none of these invitations would have been available to me. The church IHCKC (C6) was chosen because the Kampuchea Krom[31] family who led an indigenous house church in Kratie, Cambodia immigrated from the Mekong Delta to Cambodia had become VNEs in Vietnam through the influence of VNE evangelists. I had some oversight responsibilities for the young woman who was attempting to plant a church (Sambath, C6-1f) along with her father's help.[32] The church in C7-HTLAS was selected because of variations of belief and practice of the LTT. No family was followed in this setting, but a husband-wife pastoral team and two congregants were interviewed. Four interviews were obtained from expatriate Christian contributors. (CVK 1-3) Finally, three random samplings were obtained from non-VNE contributors, one male and two females, met at random, who were willing to be interviewed (C9-1-3). Four VNE leaders of para-church organizations gave interviews. (C8-1-4) The fourth component was produced from three Focus groups done among Vietnamese Pastors/Leaders on 16 December 2016. Some results were summarized and recorded. Pertinent questions were presented and a series of discussion questions were used to obtain input from a group of 25 pastors and leaders, both male and female, and are transcribed. (Focus Groups 1-3) The fifth component was composed of four audio interviews done with missionaries working, or who had worked in Vietnam, current and emeritus. (MC1-4) The sixth component (CVK1-4) was comprised of four audio interviews with four expatriate Vietnamese females. The seventh component was the recording of all of these semi-structured interviews on Audio Note

[31] This is a small ethnic minority group which may be either bi-racial (Cambodian and Vietnamese extraction), or may identify culturally with this group, though only belonging to one of the ethnic groups.
[32] See Chapter 5.5 for a more complete explanation.

on I-pad hardware. The eighth component contained the transcriptions done by three Vietnamese transcribers (Appendix A) who faithfully transcribed these interviews. Transcriptions, when finished, were checked by me, compared to the audio, and occasionally, double-checked with a second Vietnamese native speaker for clarification of specific words or phrases on the audio, then, comparing it to the written transcription for clarification. There were a very small percentage of words and phrases that could not be distinguished, even by a native speaker, due to background noise or static on the audio. However, this did not affect the comprehensive meanings of the passages being transcribed. The ninth component in the development and analysis of primary material was drawn from the reflexive journaling done by myself to aid in subjectivity-objectivity issues in my personal relationships with contributors. (Scott-Jones & Watt 2010) Reflections along with reflexive notes were recorded in Journals (J1-8). The tenth were Vietnamese texts that were used as primary sources obtained from undergraduate theses from the HTTL Seminary of South Vietnam. (Oral Sources) The eleventh and final component was the recording of these transcriptions into NVivo software. The data was coded into 34 different categories, and sub-categorized into specific thematic codes, which contained themes of meaning.[33] Each of these themes (codes) contains a specific piece of data, whether a word, a phrase or a paragraph description defining the theme. Along with the written transcripts, pictures and videos were also coded thematically according to these categories. Participant observation, as immersion within these settings, albeit a temporary immersion, allowed me from an inductive and intuitive perspective, to gain a clearer picture of the contributor's setting and background. This provides for a more accurate understanding of the contributor's context.

[33] NVivo calls these 'nodes'

2.6.8 General Logistical Issues

Common logistical issues included convenient times for scheduling interviews with those were busy, waiting for an appointment (particularly with pastors), or attending events to meet particular persons, then arranging an appropriate time. Attending LDGs of non-VNE contributors became quite difficult as these are held on a very specific date according to the Lunar Calendar. Twice I was invited to two different events, but no one could give me the exact day, as the elder grandfather had to check the calendar. On both occasions I had already planned to be out of the country and was unable to attend. However, I was able to watch one of these by Facebook video (C5-Video_FB 2015); another I personally attended (C1, 2015), as well as watching numerous video clips of LDG ceremonies online, and obtaining descriptions of these.

2.6.9 Logistical Problems in Obtaining Data from Focus Groups

Logistical problems slightly hindered the implementation of a Focus Group held in a church in Hồ Chí Minh city on 16 December 2016. My expectations were that five to ten VNE leaders would attend, instead there were 25 in attendance. They were from various Evangelical backgrounds, including Anglican (C1) Methodist (C4) Evangelical Church of Vietnam (C3), independent underground churches, as well as several lay congregants from these churches. Unfortunately, this unexpected number did not allow for a well-organized meeting, since there were too many participants to keep everyone in one discussion group. The participants were divided into 5 discussion groups but, in two cases, there were no recording devices available, and in these cases, no notes were taken. Although the summaries given orally at the end of the session, and were recorded on Audio Note in the I-Pad, some were difficult to hear. On several occasions, the transcriber was not able to hear words or phrases. This was noted in the transcription. There is no doubt, however, that some very valuable data was obtained. Gender bias was indicated within three of the audio tapes of discussion groups of Focus Group 2016 (see Primary

Sources) which were led by male pastors of significant status in the VNE community. The opinion presented in the oral summaries invariably reflected their viewpoints, as other members deferred to their status and knowledge. Those considered to be of lower status (including several female pastors present) did express opinions, both in smaller discussion groups, and the joint summary group, and did not seem hesitant to do this. During presentation of the results of their discussions, status and gender immediately became evident. The male pastor's opinion was the one accepted by the group at large.

2.7 Scope: Location in Data Collection

The geographical scope, in terms of location of the contributors, played a part in the methodological structure in this research, for location of the contributors is a factor in their views on AV rites and associated practices. The Southern region of Vietnam, particularly the Mekong Delta, has always been considered the 'wild west' region of Vietnam and may have weakened traditions in comparison to the Central and Northern regions due to long term immigration and cultural, political and economic changes. KV Nguyen states, 'While remaining essentially Vietnamese, the Mekong Delta peasant had preserved a spirit of pioneering, even of adventure. He was always ready to seek new horizons'. (1983:345) The pragmatic and forward-looking views of the Southern Vietnamese in terms of accommodating to cultural change are not profound, but are significant. These changes in small measures have affected AV rites, and while still being of great importance in terms of place as collective place, have been gradually been seen in a more pragmatic way, with a simplifying of the rites in many cases, particularly in urban areas. Much of this was due to economic and educational opportunities in different provinces, and even internationally. Added to this were profound political changes, as well as the advent of modernity, higher educational levels, and migration to the West. While none of these events in any way neutralized AV rites, some contributors felt their traditions were diminished or simplified, and more informally implemented. (C1-1f) (C4-

10f) Another (C8-1m) mentioned that he had married a woman from north Vietnam, explaining the difficulties in dealing with AV rites performed during the wedding ceremony by stating, 'it is so much more conservative up there'.[34]

Another example that showed the weakening of ritual forms among my non-VNE contributors was that there was no mention of votive articles, which are burned in the belief that these representative objects are sent to deceased members to aid them in the after-world.[35] The AV rites seen and described were quite simple, rather devoid of external ritual trappings, and were, at times, not as well attended as in decades past. VNEs who were not allowed to participate officially, usually had little problem either not attending, or giving cursory appearance with limited participation. This also indicates that, while AV rites are still important, the more pragmatic, 'forward looking spirit' of the Southerners has had some effect on the precision of ritualization, presentation and participation within AV rites and their surrounding practices (such as cooking, purchasing items, and so on). Along with this pragmatic spirit are the creeping processes of modernity, the hollowing out of overt Confucian mores in society, and more recently, globalism in urban areas that have had an overall effect over the last two decades.

Thus, the questions in interviews and subsequent analysis had to take into account this more relaxed, laissez-faire, and flexible attitudes toward spiritual matters. In fact, secondary sources alone did not show such nuance in understanding the Southerner's view of AV rites, and data collected in my own research was at times, somewhat surprising.[36] Taylor's work (2007) emphasized the re-enchantment of the population with

[34] Northern Vietnam, the birthplace of Vietnamese culture, considers itself the guardian of traditions, and this is seen in many ritual practices, both civil and religious.

[35] This is not to say that Vietnamese do not use them; one commonly sees people burning small votive papers in metal containers in front of their homes. The government has frowned upon this, though does not forbid it. In north Vietnam it was forbidden for about two decades, then re-emerged when the controls were eased. (Kwon 2007:74) Catholic authorities forbid it, and even Buddhist temple practice has begun to discourage it, as one Buddhist contributor told me. (C3-4m 2015) While it has diminished in common usage, it is still seen by some as a viable and efficacious practice.

[36] During the decade of the 1990's and up until about ten years ago, anthropological research has been

all spiritual practice, but does not speak to the issues of their diminishing due to the lack of exigency.

A total of 87 interviews were obtained from contributors from the Southern region, including Sóc Trang Province in the extreme southern Delta region to Đà Nang City[37], where two interviews were obtained. (C8-3f; C8-4m) A family (C4-12f, 13f) who had emigrated from northern Vietnam to the southern region was included, for migratory patterns from the North to the South are historical, and these migrations, in part, form the ethos and lifestyles of southern Vietnam. One other family from the Mekong Delta who immigrated out of Vietnam (C6-1-6) into Central Cambodia was interviewed, as well as their extended family still living in the Mekong Delta in Sóc Trang Province. Other contributions came from several other Southern provinces, as well as Hồ Chí Minh City. (Oral Sources)

2.8 Conclusion

A modification of Schreiter's constructed ethnographic approach, recognizing and bracketing acculturated belief and practice, going beyond semiotics, (as seen through thick description) as ethnographic theology (Wigg-Stevenson, 2014), may show more potential in revealing Christian enculturation through *habitus*, finding traits synonymous with, or correlative to traits extant in Vietnamese culture. Hammersley tells us, 'The purpose of ethnographic analysis is to produce sensitizing concepts and models that allow people to see events in new ways. The value of these models is to be judged by others in terms of how useful they find them'. (1990:15) While the purpose of this thesis does not specifically allow for implementation in a given setting, it is hoped that, at very least, the 'sensitizing concepts' under the microscope of ethnographical research will bring to the

focused mainly on northern Vietnam, due to government controls. Taylor (2007a) and Đỗ's works (2003) are exceptional in the regard that they were able to work, though with difficulty, in the southern region.

[37] Đà Nang is technically considered central Vietnam, but the HTTL denomination is only divided into two branches, the southern and the northern. This contributor from Da Nang has life-long ties to the southern branch, and is extensively tied in cultural terms to southern Vietnam.

fore potential for epistemological shifts among VNEs, particularly in regard to AV rites, to develop. Data showed that, even among those born into Evangelicalism, there was some discomfort with present viewpoints and behaviours regarding AV rites. A few indicated a willingness to view the rites from different perspectives and seek new solutions (C8-3f; C8-4m) and several indicated dissatisfaction with the current ethos in regard to prohibitions on AV rites. (C8-4m, C1-14m, C8-3f, C8-2m) Indeed, the desired end of this research is not simply to produce ethnography and present descriptions of an aspect of culture; the value of the model is judged by how useful it is. The success of this model will be determined by those VNE communities who desire to 'see events in new ways' to allow for change.

Chapter Three

Examining the Lễ Đám Giỗ

3.1 Historical Context for the Practice of Ancestral Veneration

One of the key indigenous rituals within Vietnamese society (for possibly two thousand years) is the honouring of and sacramental remembrance of one's ancestral lineage. While ritual veneration is performed at various times, such as at Lunar New Year, weddings, and funerals, the most common ritual practice is the LDG, performed for significant deceased lineage, particularly the male patrilineal line, once a year on his death anniversary. At times, married women return to their own extended family to participate in AV rites, or, at times adopt and follow the husband's AV rites more closely.

There is some scholarly consensus that ancestral worship rites began prior to the advent of Confucian practice in Vietnam, eventually merging with Confucian and Mencian thought to the extent that these beliefs became part of Vietnamese societal institutions and appeared to be mutually inclusive. Confucian societal systems were introduced by Chinese scholars to Giáo Chi (northern Vietnam) (Buttinger,1958:17-55) at some time after the beginning of the Common Era. Vietnamese spiritual belief systems show acculturation and cultural borrowing within its world view and most particularly, in the development of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism familial and social institutions, which includes AV practices. (Woodside 1971:37-50)

Currently the majority of the Vietnamese population follow no institutionalized religions (PEW-GRF 2010), but along with AV practice, adhere to separate popular spiritual practices simultaneously, for example, visits to a fortune teller, the worship of Ông Tài (the fortune god), Ông Đĩa, (the earth god), or Ông Táo (the kitchen god), and high autonomy and high tolerance is seen in these practices. However, all Vietnamese believe in Ông Trời (in common vernacular, Mr. Heaven), who VNEs believe to be

synonymous with the God of Christianity, and who often use this term in evangelism when explaining Christian beliefs. (5.) Numerous bodhisattvas are seen in Buddhist temples, and other temple complexes contain tutelary saints such as Trần Hừng Đao, one of the panoply of Vietnamese historical heroes, and of whom the most recent is Hồ Chí Minh. A contributor who acknowledged his Communist Party membership said that 'today some people also worship Hồ Chí Minh' (C1-4m_2015). None of my contributors indicated any interest in him, in Trần Hừng Đao, or various female goddesses, but scholars indicate that these each have their own significant following (Doan L 1999; Nguyen N T 2015; Mcallister & Luckman 2015). Local tutelary gods in villages with their associated festivals are too numerous to list. Among my non-Christian contributors, Quan Âm was by far the most popular figure of worship, and even those who specified that 'my family does not follow any religion 'might have an altar to her in their home. A young man from Central Vietnam, who had lived in Hồ Chí Minh city to attend university, told me that 'my family does not have any religion, we just worship the ancestors, and we have an altar to Quan Âm, which sits higher than the ancestral altar for respect. This is the way of the life of Vietnamese people'. (C9-2m 2016)

AV rites may be practiced parallel to (and in some cases, syncretized with) Buddhist beliefs. For example, the LDG, among Buddhist adherents may be performed in a Buddhist temple, and ancestral urns also be kept there. In many homes, the altar to Quan Âm may be located next to or below the ancestral altar, and, she may be worshipped with incense before the incense is lit for the ancestors at the LDG. See (3.5.1) and (Figure 5.1) Since the mid-1990's, due to the Vietnamese government's decision to relax restrictions on many religious practices, a dramatic upsurge has been seen in virtually every area of indigenous spirituality. (Taylor 2007b:1–2) All of these practices continued through the period of the most pronounced governmental control, but now have perceptively strengthened, and can be seen in the public arena. Churches across Vietnam

also experienced great growth, both during the 'difficult years' when governmental repression was a standard procedure and currently, when virtually all Evangelical and Roman Catholic churches are packed on any given Sunday morning.

3.2 What does the Government Think?

The Socialist government of Vietnam continues to keeps a very close eye on all matters religious.[38] Forms of social engineering were carried out in the northern provinces (Malarney 2003:225–256) after 1954. After apparently fighting a losing battle to control various worship forms and repress customs surrounding AV rites (particularly in terms of food consumption, seen as ostentatious and bourgeois) these restrictions were lifted in the later part of the 1990's. Southern provinces were not as much affected, but educational institutions (all of which are currently run by the government) stress moral values, which includes the performance of AV rites as a moral virtue, but are not discussed in religious terms. (Pastor___C4-16m, Amber, C9-1f) The rites are now fully accepted by and even supported at all levels of government, including the worship, by government officials, of the various dynasties of ancient times, particularly the Hùng dynasty. (Jellema 2007:19)

The Vietnamese government has, for decades, most severely in the North, but certainly in the Southern regions as well, frowned on, fined and directly forbidden many spiritual practices considered to be superstitious *(mê tín dị đoan)*, particularly, mediumship *(lên đồng)* practices. These are still technically illegal, but are now gradually re-emerging, or simply continued surreptitiously during the repressive decades of Socialism. (Endres 2007; Taylor 2007) Along with engineered Socialist values, there is a distinct epistemological slant toward a more empirical, modern worldview of Western scientific rationalism, which entered Vietnamese thought through French schools in the early part of the twentieth century. The materialist tenets of Marxist-Leninist ideologies

[38] Persecution, and even murder of Christian ethnic minorities has been well documented in Vietnam. It continues to be on the Tier 1 U.S. watch list, as country of particular concern. https://www.uscirf.gov/all-countries/countries-of-particular-concern-tier-1

incorporated into the education system since 1954 have also left an imprint upon Vietnamese epistemology. (Woodside 1976; Nguyen 2012)

3.3 A Syncretic Vietnamese Spirituality

One of the most common Vietnamese sayings in regard to all things religious is, 'all religions are good' (*đạo nào cũng tốt*) which is often said by the average Vietnamese. The word *đạo*[39] is literally translated, 'the way', but may refer to 'religion', as well as various Daoist and Buddhist practices, but, most commonly, moral duty, or moral teaching.[40] Vietnamese society has traditionally and unashamedly adapted, inculcated, and absorbed numerous spiritual practices from other Asian nations, most particularly, China.

During the early formation of Vietnam as a nation independent from China, Jamieson states

> Vietnam was under Chinese rule for more than a thousand years (111 B.C.- 939 A.D.) and during that time Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism flowed into Vietnam to influence the worldview of the population. (Ho H T 1985:26-27) Over the centuries these three schools of thought became intertwined, simplified and Vietnamized to constitute along with vestiges of earliest animistic beliefs of Vietnamese folk religion. This syncretic set of beliefs, sometimes referred to as "Three Religions, One Source" was shared to some extent by all Vietnamese regardless of region or social class. (1991:6)

Its history has also been permeated, to some degree, by influences from other Southeast Asian nations. Virtually every province of Vietnam has some form of female goddess and each has her own set of followers. For example, the Indianized Hindu Champa kingdom, whose influence lasted until after 700 C E, worshipped its mythical founder, Po Nagar. These practices were appropriated by the Vietnamese, and she is still worshipped today as Thiên Y Thánh Mẫu. Alongside these forms are the worship of numerous Mother Goddesses, or Thánh Mẫu, which are incorporated into the supernatural side of Taoism, and have been appropriated into Vietnamese culture from antiquity. These practises are often highly localized and followed by certain strata of society, such as the goddess Bà

[39] For a Christian theology on the meaning and importance of the Đạo and 'đạo' as central to all Vietnamese beliefs, see KS Nguyen (Nguyen KS 2017).
[40] The Đạo is also tied to Taoism, and the Tao, see (Lafarge, Tze et al.,1992)

Chúa Xứ (thought to possibly be an incarnation of Thiên Y Thánh Mẫu), who has a highly dedicated following of female small business owners. (Taylor 2004:85) These Taoist practices appear indigenous, but have been assimilated and 'Vietnamized 'through appropriation and improvisation, but are not practiced by a majority of the population. Contributor Trang (CVK4f), who, when I mentioned this goddess, (whose shrine is in a nearby province) told me that she had never heard of her. The individualism and autonomy within a Vietnamese worldview allow for high level of personal choice and tolerance toward spiritual practices toward numerous deities, even in a high grid society. The adage *đạo nào cũng tốt* applies here, for any spiritual form that leads to the formation of morality is thought to be good; it aids one in self-cultivation or moral development.

Vietnamese Buddhism, brought into northern Vietnamese culture during the Hán Việt era, saw Southeast Asian monks from various traditions as well as from China, who introduced these beliefs and practices throughout Vietnam. (Taylor 1991:80–83) It was gradually assimilated over its long history, and with the rise and fall of various royal courts, Buddhist religious institutions were established, but eventually declined in significance, as established systems of Confucianism rose in prominence and began to form social norms. Pure Land Buddhism (Greater Vehicle) is the most commonly practised form today, into which is incorporated the worship of the Bodhisattva Quan Âm, (Bồ Tát Quan Âm) alongside the Buddha and numerous other Bodhisattvas. This has spread across the entirety of Vietnam, while Southernmost provinces, such as Sóc Trang, (due to Cambodian influence) also practice Theravada Buddhism. In these areas there is some syncretic practice between the two branches.

This long history of these intertwined belief systems, with AV practices in parallel, combined or syncretized spirituality, definitively affects a Vietnamese worldview. (KS Nguyen 2017:289) Such an epistemological stance allows room for the improvisation and innovation of new spiritual practices which could allow the

enculturation of the gospel message if the tabus surrounding ancestral veneration could be re-negotiated through the construct of new models, and will be discussed in later Chapters.

3.4 General Descriptions of the Lễ Đám Giỗ

The presence of the altar in a Vietnamese home always implies that food offerings placed upon it are dedicated to deceased ancestors, after which the family, usually communally, eat the food. This typically occurs once a year on the death day anniversary of a significant elder, usually the grandfather, or great-grandfather. Some families may have as many as four of these per year (Lạc, C2-1f) or as few as one.

These spiritual practices focus around several ritual actions: first, the lighting of incense, some form of bowing before the altar, an invocation to the ancestors and finally, the consumption of offered food, (*đồ cúng*) within the extended family, occurring on Vietnamese holidays and at weddings and funerals. The most commonly practised, self-replicating ritual is the death day anniversary, the *lễ đám giỗ,* (LDG), which involves inviting the entire extended family on either the paternal or maternal side, as well as special guests, (such as honoured teachers), or others in special relationship with deceased members. For example, Mrs Lạc's (C2-1f) family keeps traditional AV rites back four generations on the paternal side, with different families each hosting these four LDG ceremonies. Current practices in some arenas, (particularly in large cities, such as Hồ Chí Minh City), have diminished to some degree, often being practised just for the deceased grandparents. The central idea behind the venerating of the ancestors, has been, of course, that the ancestors continue to commune with the family line, continuing in some metaphysical way to be part of the family, being invited through an invocation in the ancestral prayer. These prayers are numerous and varied and have been shaped and re-shaped over the centuries. Often, after lighting the incense and saying the prayer, the incense is allowed to burn down halfway, for tradition dictates that this is the moment of

their return. One female contributor noted, ‘when you see the incense curl, you know that the ancestors are there’. (Hạnh, C3-6f)

3.4.1 The Food at the LDG: How Important is it?

It is impossible to underestimate the importance of the feast itself, and within the scope of this research, there seemed to be a wide latitude of specialty dishes which were acceptable. Specialty rice dishes, instead of common white rice, are served, often along with dishes which the deceased was/were fond of. The domestic aspect, particularly the acts associated with cooking, is an integral part of the ritual and an expression of *habitus*, the filial disposition expressing familial ideals, and which contains a subdued expression of sacramentality. The feast expresses one essential element of this, along with fellowship and enjoyment.

The meal was of such great importance that when asked about LDG, often answers would come back in terms of how many tables, and how many guests would be invited. Grandmother, (Điều C4-5f) the matriarch of the family of VNE Evangelist___ (C4-1m) responded in just this way when asked about the performance of the LDG. The mechanics of the feast were particularly important to women. For female family members, much of the day would be spent cooking as a vital part of the overall ritual performance. In this way, the female members are vital participants and share the essence of the rituals, for without the food and the feast there can be no performance of a sacramental remembrance. While memorial was certainly important, of just as great an importance was the enjoyment of the guests, the amount of food, and how many tables there were, which was at times, a statement of status within the community.[41]

While non-Christian contributors saw the food as very important, it was always mentioned in terms of the living, not the dead. Mrs Gái (C5-3f) stated that she lights

[41] Bourdieu defines this as cultural or symbolic capital. (1977: 179)

incense and eats offered food, but, she said, 'I wouldn't be upset if I just ate the food from the kitchen, and not the food off the altar', indicating an ambivalent response toward the efficacy of the ritual and the need to eat the offerings. This did not seem to be nearly as important as participation with the living extended family. She expressed simply what Avieli again describes as one of the key reasons for the LDG:

> First and foremost, ancestor worship rituals are the most frequent occasions in which the boundaries of inclusion of the extended family are manifested and where belonging to a specific social group is expressed, maintained and intensified. Thus, participating in these rituals is a kind of 'membership card" in the extended family. The shared meal clearly enhances these feelings of belonging. (2007:130)

3.4.2 Debunking a Popular Myth: Fear or Love?

The LDG is traditionally seen as a time that the ancestors come back to visit the living. (Toán Anh: 1969:24) It is for this particular reason that VNEs refuse to participate in or perform any of the rites, as these are seen as a means of connecting with the spiritual world, and if, as Christian doctrine dictates, Christians are not allowed to contact the dead, one might be inadvertently participating in an occult practice, even opening oneself up to the demonic realm. (see Chapter Four) Eating the offerings is absolutely unacceptable, for these are seen as sacrifices to communicate with and possibly to appease the dead, and considered both idolatrous (the worship of other gods), as well as participating in superstitions. (Bữu C1-9m, C4-12f, C2-1f)

Differentiation should be stressed between the ancestral invocation, and that of soul calling (*gọi hồn*) (Endres 2008:755-73), or mediumship (*lên đồng*). (Malarney 2003:244-248) One contributor (Trang C-5-1f) told me that her mother-in-law practiced mediumship in secret once a year, which is illegal, a practice completely separated from the LDG. While these two practices of mediumship are in resurgence in Vietnam (Endres 2007; 2008), AV practices are completely distinct from them. *Linh*, as spiritual power, is, for the most part, absent in the LDG; power is sought from other spiritual sources. (1.4.8) There is a strong distinction between these practices and the more benign invitation to

the ancestors to 'come and share' with the family. In some cases, this invocation is symbolic, but even for those who believed the ancestors were present at the LDG, nothing more occurred; there seemed no desire among the living for ancestors to communicate with the family.

A popular myth demands that food placed upon the AV altar to 'feed the ancestors' and, if not fed properly, these ancestors may come back to haunt or harm one. Though this belief is thought to be pervasive in popular culture, and often talked or joked about, to my surprise, none of the non-Christian contributors mentioned these elements. They overwhelmingly emphasized the importance of the family coming together, eating the meal together and fulfilling their filial obligations, particularly that of remembrance. Some traditions dictate that the ancestors consume a small portion of the offering (Avieli, 2007); other scholars (Dang 1994), discount this:

> Moreover, we ought to know that ceremonial offerings are done to express our reverence, not to serve or care for our ancestors. Hence, we do [these] sacrificial offerings, in a way to express our affection for our ancestors. (Phan KB 1915:12-13, 25)

None of my contributors mentioned any such activity. It did not seem important. However, one non-VNE contributor said that before the day of the LDG, her mother would come to her in a dream and remind her 'that the day [of the LDG] is coming' (Hạnh, C3-6f), but she laughed when I asked if she was afraid of being harmed or haunted. 'My grandfather was a wonderful man! He would never do that!' She also never indicated that he needed to be fed in the after-world. Contributor (C9-3f, 2016) said, 'They are my grandparents, they would never do that. Why should I be afraid? I love them'. Mrs Trức, a Vietnamese-American, went back to visit her family in Cần Thơ City after many years. She noted, 'I couldn't tell if they [my relatives] really believed my grandfather was present or not … one time someone lost their keys, and tossed an orange on the altar and said, "grandpa, help me find my keys." It didn't seem very respectful!' (CVK-3) Her relatives certainly did not fear their ancestors. She also mentioned that on the day of the

LDG, one of her uncles spoke to the ancestors, saying, 'well the economy is not too good this year, so the feast is so small!' (CVK-3) Here is not only seen the ambivalence of many contributors toward presence, but the lack of fear of being haunted or harmed. A key contributor, Mrs Khanh, 55 years-old (C1-1f), stated that Vietnamese people were afraid if they did not worship their ancestors as this was an unfilial act (*bất hiếu*):

> They are not afraid of their ancestors, because their parents would never harm them; they love them. They are afraid of Ông Trời. They believe that Ông Trời will punish them if they do not do this. I think that most Vietnamese people, generally speaking, believe this…my parents did not teach me this, they just taught it as remembrance, but for most people, I think they believe that.

Filial acts toward ancestors, are then, as described above, pointed toward the source, *Ông Trời*, the highest spiritual being in the Vietnamese cosmology. While popular myths may be believed in some quarters, it was not seen among this group of contributors. The non-material trait of filiality is exemplified which, if ignored, may be justly punished.

While googling the term *bất hiếu*, I was amazed at the abundance of YouTube videos (YouTube_Video_Ông Trời Có Mắt Đứa Con Gái Bất Hiếu 2017) available that showed the punishment of those who were not filial. The element of punishment by Ông Trời show a connection between the importance of 'remembering the source' of one's ancestors. If filiality is ignored or abused, Ông Trời has the power to punish, thus, an element of fear is associated with AV practice.

3.5 Participant Observation by the Researcher at the Lễ Đám Giỗ (LDG)

Three different LDG ceremonies are described below in three different locations.

3.5.1 Location C1

I attended the LDG at the house of Mrs Khanh (C1-1f) a new believer, for her grandfather, grandmother and several other deceased family members in an urban setting in Hồ Chí Mình city. The participants included her father, (the patriarch) her mother, numerous siblings and their spouses, a revered teacher, several guests, and Mrs Khanh's Christian expatriate friend from her English-speaking Bible study group. Her 50-year-old younger

brother (Kiệt, C1-4m), lit the incense sticks on two altars (the ancestral altar and the altar to Quan Âm), performing the ritual gesture of waving the incense sticks (*thập lai)* over his head, then placed them on the altar. After the incense burned down (during which time the guests chatted and milled around the living room) her father called everyone to the ceremony.[42] Khanh's father, Mr Bổng (C1-2m), stood in front of the altar, calling the ancestors to return, and addressing them directly with literary expressions. No one left the room during this time (versus some descriptions stating that guests do not enter the room until the incense sticks have burned down half-way). (Avieli, 2007:129)

Mrs Khanh described her family's own interpretation of the ceremony:

> This is done as each person wishes. My father [who led the LDG ritual] speaks in a rather literary manner…extensively. Really the LDG [prayer] is a simple one, lighting incense to the ancestors, saying, "Today is the day to remember you, who have gone, we descendants come back to light incense."…my parents express it in a more detailed way, "Thank you ancestors, today our family gathers, we are able to make a living, we return to the LDG, to give words of thanks." Then our general circumstances are explained, that is, how affluent we are, that we live prosperously and are not in poverty and suffering. (C1-1f)

Other invocations may be simpler, for as Khanh noted, 'this is done as each person wishes'. Simple improvisations such as those above are common in both prayer and in ritual presentation.

Gifts of food, brought by the guests, were sitting on the altar. After this very brief ritual, the sumptuous meal began, the men sitting at a separate table and drinking beer throughout. Enjoyment, conversation, and food and drink were the central focus. At our table, the conversation centred on the food, meeting old friends, and various normal topics. Guests mentioned that they regretted the fact that they only had a chance to meet at together once a year. Some guests were given food from the altar to take home, and some was kept for the family. In this case, no food from the altar ever reached the table. For Khanh, and several other Christians at the table, there were no conflicts. In fact, the only difference was the three-minute ritual at the altar. After the ritual, I would not have

[42] The eldest son had died some time past, or he would have held this position of lighting the incense sticks and bowing before the ancestral altar.

known that this was an LDG, but felt it could have been any Vietnamese family gathering. The whole spirit of the evening centred on familial togetherness, feasting, and supposedly, memorial, though I never heard anyone conversing about those who had passed away. The only ritual was done through the simple, very brief 'calling of the ancestors to return' and the lighting of incense which supposedly constituted the act of worship. Tradition assumes that the ancestors return at this moment, though no one indicated this in any way. Oldest sister, Chị Hai, (Journal 1, 2015:29) explained her lack of conviction regarding her grandfather's presence: 'Well, he's been gone so long. You really have to believe that for it to be so'.[43] When asked about the LDG gathering one year later, Khanh said, 'Oh it was so small, so many people cannot come. In the past, you could never do this, you had to come'. This fraying of familial togetherness seemed quite distressing to her, indicating the importance of this custom, even from her chosen position of not participating directly in the rites.

3.5.2 Location C2

A young woman of 28, Mrs Lạc, (C2-1f) told me that her parents, who go back to the ancestral home in Long An province to participate in AV practices, stand in front of the altar, whispering to the ancestors, asking them to return and light the incense while the guests are outside. Later, the guests enter the house and begin the feast. She said that her parents say something similar to this: 'We, [name], invite you [name] to come to our house, at [address] and respectfully share this feast with us'. This simple invocation is all that is necessary, and her parents wait until the incense sticks have burned down halfway. Then, the guests are invited into the room and begin the feast. The older male who performs the ceremony detailed above, (Ri, C2-3m) is a sixty year old man who has

[43] Journal C1, p. 29-30. This is not to indicate that she did not believe in the immortality of the soul. After her mother died two years later, she and her siblings insisted on numerous Buddhist ceremonies to guide her mother's soul on to her new life, and were fearful if these were not performed. They firmly believed that their mother was present in the family home until the forty-ninth day after her death. (2017, Journal C1 p. 49)

emphatically stated that he 'does not follow any religion' and does not believe that the souls of the ancestors return to the altar: 'It doesn't matter if you *cúng* [worship by lighting incense or offer food] at all, this is all for the living'. The importance of it, he said, is the *đạo làm người* (to fulfil one's duty as a person) which means, to be filial, or, *hiếu* as well as expressing the inculcated value of *biết ơn*, that of fulfilling one's moral obligation. (Ri C2-3m)

3.5.3 Location C5

One would expect that in a rural setting, such as Vĩnh Lòng province, more traditional forms and practice would be maintained. This LDG, ceremony, seen by video, (CV5, FB_2015) was explained to me by Trang, (C5-1f) a 48-year-old VNE woman, as she videoed it. Three tables in the *nhà thờ* [communal house] were designated for ancestors, one being on the altar itself, one table near the altar for the deceased lineage, and one outside on the porch, for other souls who have no family. 'Cô Bảy [Aunt Seven] has studied this', Trang (C5-1f) told me, so 'it is done as she prescribes'. In the video, Cô Bảy, representing her oldest son[44] would offer, (*cúng*), and speak to and invite the ancestor to return. Then an older male family member repeated this by lighting incense sticks from the altar and both tables, holding the incense sticks, for a second, over his head. No one was sitting at those tables, but they were filled with food, as was the altar. After the incense burned down, the guests were invited to eat from the offered food at the tables where the incense was burning. The ritual was very brief, and there was little solemnity. The guests were milling around, talking, and one person was lying in a hammock in the corner of the room. The only separation Trang practises in terms of table fellowship is the stipulation that the tray of food for herself and her children has not been

[44] Due to cultural changes, fluidity and improvisations are now in play: women, representing a male elder may perform these rituals. This may show influence by new Socialist ideologies which attempted to deal destructive blows on the old Confucian system. (Huu 2016)

placed on the altar, and only her mother is aware of this secret exchange of food trays.

3.6 Weakened Confucian Societal Structures and the Perpetuation of AV Practices

The deepest values of filiality are enculturated within Vietnamese culture and family lineage (Liu, 2003; Jamieson, 1995) and these are expressed through AV rites. The weakened hierarchical societal systems of Confucianism persist in Mekong Delta regions in basic functions of patriarchalism and providing familial place. At the same time, some of the excesses associated with a Confucian feudalism have begun to fade (such as the lower status of women).

These rites do not necessarily function in a completely efficacious manner, for, if they did, Vietnamese would not feel the need to have other spiritual practices in their lives. AV rites fulfil the basic functions for bonding in terms of familial and communal place as well as evidencing inherent sacramentality connected to a Vietnamese ontology. The ancestors occupy a place in the Vietnamese cosmology, and familial place extends beyond the realm of the living. However, the blessing of the ancestors is not enough: other spiritual practices, whether Taoist (the kitchen god, and the Mother goddesses), and/or, most often, Buddhist beliefs (*tin ngưỡng*) and practices are added for efficacy. To receive answers to the problems of life, including financial, marital, fertility, educational success, worship is most often focused toward Quan Âm, to whom both women and men go for aid.

Mr. Bỗng, at 80 years-old, is a great-grandfather who lives in the community *đình*, Hành Thiện Tương Tế, of his Northern ancestral village, the protector of his lineage that began in the Red River delta area over 700 years ago, in Ho Chi Minh city. This *đình* was incorporated into a small Buddhist temple. As its caretaker for some years, he performed spiritual duties as well as physical ones. He firmly believed in the presence of his lineage's saint from Nam Định province in North Vietnam, for when I asked permission to enter the temple area, he asked verbal permission from the saint whose plaster image appeared

above the statues of the Buddha inside the temple complex. (Video C1-1), then relayed to me that the saint had agreed. His position as patriarch was evidenced by his leading the LDG ritual at his wife's home. He stated that 'we have to take responsibility for our lives, and seek forgiveness, after all, the ancestors cannot forgive everything we do' C1-2m 2015). He was the only contributor to mention forgiveness from sinful action from one's ancestors, and then only in terms of non-efficacy. Seeking restitution, he sought to gain merit by becoming the temple's guardian, through spiritual beings of perceived higher power and efficacy in attempting to atone for the wayward actions of his past. Living in the *đình* (although he did not want to) was, he believed an efficacious means of seeking forgiveness and merit through Buddhist practice. He recognized the limitations of simply seeking forgiveness from his ancestors, even those having been venerated for over 700 years past.

Seen in settings such as these, AV rites did not seem particularly efficacious in the sense of receiving specific blessings. One exception was a noted by young man from a Central province, now living in Hồ Chí Minh city, who said, 'I am Vietnamese and this belief still exists in me… that the ancestors come to visit us and help us'. (C9-2m) Central Vietnam is known to have more deeply formulated beliefs and traditions, rather than the amalgam of practice due to long-term migration in the Mekong Delta.

3.7 'Losing One's Place in the Order of Things'?

The oldest son and oldest brother (Hai, C5-3m, 2015) of the Ngô family (C5, 1-4), was separated from his father when his father abandoned the family during his later childhood. Hai, in spite of many family difficulties, is adamantly opposed to belonging to any religion, whether it be Evangelical Christianity, Buddhism or Catholicism (much to the sorrow of his younger sister, (C5-1f), who has witnessed to him on a number of occasions). He cannot take part in the LDG of his father's family line, but on occasion

attends the LDG of his mother's side. This ceremony does not have tremendous significance for him, and he does not believe that the ancestors are present. However, his many troubles and disillusionment in life in general seem to have affected the desire to form any deep belief system. He has been separated from the paternal ancestral lineage, and is only connected to his mother's lineage. He and his wife, along with a younger brother had lived in Cambodia for several years, but were eventually forcibly repatriated by the Cambodian government. At that time, his father was also in Cambodia, but was not performing his paternal duties as prescribed by Vietnamese custom. As the oldest son his status should have been to follow in his father's footsteps and at least be present at the LDG of his paternal relatives, and lighting incense at the altar along with his father. In this case, the disintegration of the patrilineal family line has played a part in his desire to participate and spiritual beliefs His overwhelming concern is to try to keep his family out of endemic poverty, a life-long battle. For him, the AV rites are just seen as traditions, belonging to his mother's lineage.

3.8 Improvisation in AV Rites

Jellema posits that AV practice has been re-energized by the migrations of Vietnamese to literally every part of the world, and the return of these immigrants as expatriates (Việt Kiều). Jellema calls this phenomenon, *về nguồn*, [return to the source] in her study on the perpetuity and fluidity in AV rite expression. She posits that to 'go out'(*đi)* and return (*về)* is a 'normative separation', and this new normative quality 'encourages mobility, migration and the widening of cultural horizons'. (Taylor, citing Jellema, 2007:20) Việt Kiều return to regroup with family, ancestors, lineage and ancestral lands (*quê hương).* This is both a confirmation of 'locative religion' the need to know who one is and where one is) (Padgett, 2007:14), but most importantly, is an expression of the deeply embedded inhabituation of filiality, an expression of the 'debt that cannot be repaid', (Jamieson

1991:10) and a remembering of the source (*nhớ nguồn)*. She identifies 'remembering the source' as an integral part of this trait, but demonstrates its 'elasticity', defined in this research as improvisation in the enlarging of locative religious beliefs beyond the boundaries of homeland and shaping new social norms for those living in the diaspora. Ancestral practices persist but are adapted selectively as they are influenced by refugee and migration upheavals, economic and governmental change. The improvisation of accepting separation and reconnection in AV practice show the adaptability of the Vietnamese to re-shape their spiritual practices, allowing for permanent innovation, described by Herskovits:

> This adjustment is furthered by the creativeness which, as a fundamental expression of the restlessness of the individual in the face of the ways of his group, permits him to exercise various modes of self-expression, and thus, to extend the scope of his culture without breaking down its basic orientations. (1949:641)

At least 1,000,000 Vietnamese have migrated to Western nations, and the Vietnamese diaspora has, or soon will, affect culture inside Vietnam. AV rites have shown an amazing propensity for improvisation both inside and outside Vietnam, particularly in the Southern regions. Modifications are in the works to fit the new circumstances of modernity, especially in urban areas (Nguyen 1994). Along with this, the rites are, for dedicated Buddhists, incorporated into, and function alongside, Buddhist practice. Vietnamese migrants living in the *diaspora* in Orange County, California, have, with the help of Buddhist priests, adapted to their new circumstances, by, in at least in some cases, distributing the ashes of their recently deceased ancestors in coastal waters of the Pacific ocean; a practice which never occurred previously within traditional indigenous ancestral or Buddhist practices in Vietnam. (Padgett, DM 2007:129)

3.9 Improvisations Between AV Rites and a Dedicated Buddhist Family

Amber's (C9-1f) family became dedicated Buddhists after her grandmother experienced severe post-natal depression, (seen as possession by a lost soul). After monks performed exorcisms for her and she 'recovered her own soul' she insisted that the entire extended

family become Buddhists, and they complied. Amber and her brother were dedicated in a local temple in District Four in Hồ Chí Minh city shortly after birth. Amber was committed to Buddhism even while expressing some concerns about the lower status of women in regard to temple practice, and fear of being visited by the dead. Amber's grandfather, the patriarch, performs the AV rites; the grid of the societal hierarchy remains in place. Amber's grandmother is the keeper of the Buddhist cult, going to the temple on the death day anniversary of her great-grandmother at noon, while Amber's grandfather performs the AV rites at home simultaneously.[45] When the ceremonies are over, the family comes together at her grandfather's home for the LDG feast. For a Buddhist, Amber explained to me, the greatest importance is the ability of each soul to move onward and upward toward a better existence in the next life, and eventually, to reach paradise.

> Grandfather gives offerings to great-grandmother, he and not the women does it. He does the [Buddhist] prayers and insists that the whole family come back to his house for the LDG. He will pray [Buddhist] prayers, do the ceremony, you wish for the best to the dead, and my grandma she will also pray. She will wish the best for the dead; wish them to move on quickly; not lingering here, she wants them to move on to the afterlife. She doesn't want them to stay here with us, … but to go as fast as they could. Then after that is just a party, just eating we gather around, we don't actually talk about the dead, we just know that this is the LDG of great-grandmother and that's it. [sic]. (Amber, C9-1f)

Buddhist dogma teaches that reincarnation occurs on the forty-ninth day after death, and those who remain behind are lost and suffering souls who cannot find their way to a new, and hopefully, a better life. Of course, AV traditions have always dictated the opposite: the family desires, and invites the return of the deceased at the LDG. Amber's statements indicate how Buddhist families adroitly combine Buddhist dogma while at the same time preserving the innate sacrality of remembrance in AV practice, maintaining the central moral duties (*ơn* and *biết ơn),* thus fulfilling one's filial duties of personhood (*đạo làm người)*. AV rites in this case, are subsumed under Buddhist rituals. Both sets of rites

[45] The LDG for her great-grandfather are performed in Central Vietnam, in Danang city by another relative. This was their original native soil and the birthplace (*quê hương*) of her great-grandparents.

carefully 'cover all the bases', preserving, maintaining and nurturing family bonds, but appropriate the belief that the ancestor's lack of presence indicates entrance into 'western paradise' (*miên tây cưc lặc*), superseding the tradition which requires her great-grandmother's presence. 'This is what she [would] want when she dies, she wants to move on to the west, the west is the best Paradise … She doesn't want to linger; she doesn't want to be in the house. She does not want to come home with us'. (C9-1f) Embracing Buddhism is seen as a highly individualized choice, but if embraced by the family, improvisations such as these are autonomously implemented by the family in order to align Buddhist tenets with traditional AV practice. However, the heart of AV practice, the ethical disposition of filiality and the belief in the 'sacrality of remembrance' are preserved.

3.10 Innovation in a Dedicated Buddhist Family

Trang's (CVK-4 f) family, originally folk Buddhists in Tây Ninh province, demonstrated innovation within AV rites. Traditionally worshipping Buddha and Quan Âm, her beloved grandmother adopted a very pure form of Buddhism[46], in which no spiritual being receives any offerings at all, including Buddha, Quan Âm, or the ancestors. Her grandmother, a widow, dressed as a Buddhist lay nun, shaved her head, lived simply, and took down all Buddhist and ancestral altars in her home. Trang, now an expatriate, remembers her grandmother each year with her siblings and extended family via the internet, but they do not use any altars to promote her memory inside or outside of Vietnam. Special food is cooked and they all participate in a Facebook meeting in which they remember her and eat a special meal with their own families. In this case, no altar and no incense offerings are needed to express filiality. Love, honouring and remembrance are expressed through a rather unique re-forming of familial filial piety,

[46] The contributor could not state this, but it was probably Vietnamese Zen Buddhism.

piety re-shaped through both Buddhist belief and a unique form chosen by the extended family. Here again, is evidence at a familial level of significant unregulated improvisation in which no altars, incense, bowing or offered food are necessary. Such unregulated improvisation offers potential for new embodied rituals for VNEs to imitate.

3.11 Personal Agency in Interpreting LDG Rites

Hữu describes the traditional Vietnamese belief that 'the departed are not separated from the living, their souls hover around the ancestral altar'. (2016:42) However, many contributors were ambivalent in this regard and some rejected this altogether. Current Vietnamese scholars are unsure of how to address this issue in an age of post-modernity. Some scholars do adhere to this ontology (see Toán Anh 1969), but, many do not, having embraced Western empiricism.

> Religion and beliefs are invested with pragmatism in Vietnam. The common people are in need of a supernatural power to help them cope with human demands in their lives. If the first does not work they will beseech another god for further help ... the religious sense possessed by the non-Christian population is not really very profound … their religious spirit is diffused, like a background light. (Đạng Nghiêm Vạn 1995:363-4)

Trang's family (C5-1f) demonstrated personal agency in regard to ancestors 'presence: 'only two of my aunts believe that the ancestors return at the LDG, that is, Cô Năm (Aunt Number Five) and Cô Bảy (Aunt Seven)'. Cô Năm firmly believed that daily lighting of the incense (done very day by her husband) invites the departed back to the home. She says she has seen them when the incense is lit, but her husband scoffed at this, saying he had never seen them. (C5m-6f) Other family members, she told me, 'do not think anything really happens, it is just a *kỷ niệm* [memorial]'. Personal agency and high tolerance of other's religious beliefs were completely acceptable among family units, provided that each one fulfills filial obligation, as VNE member, Trang, (C5-1f) does by passive attendance. Mrs Mỹ (C2-4f) showed ambivalence when asked whether she believed the ancestors returned during the LDG, as she replied, smiling, but with uncertainty:

> I don't know, but if the dead are as the living, they could return. I think that is so, but we don't know [certainly] as the person has died. I think that may be so, but down here [on earth] we don't know'. When asked where the soul of her husband's grandfather went after death she replied, 'I don't know, I just know to ask him to hear, but if he doesn't hear, then we still continue, we don't know. I just pray to him to hear, if he does, that's good, if he doesn't, why do we do it?

Her interpretation, common to about half of non-VNE contributors, showed ambivalence. Her position is perhaps most indicative of what Vietnamese contributors believed: while the belief in the immortality of the soul was strong (whether it be from a Buddhist, Catholic, Evangelical Christian, or indigenous spirituality) many of them did not seem certain of an immediate presence of their ancestor in the specific place and time, but this did not lessen the ritual's efficacy which was the expression of one's filial duty; whether the ancestor was definitively present was not important. High autonomy and tolerance were evident, both in family and communally. A minority of (mainly female) contributors were definite about it. (C4-9f, C6-5f, C3-6f, C1-2,m) Some told me that they did not belief in the ancestors' presence, including a dedicated Buddhist (C9-1f) two Catholics (C1-5f) (C1-15m), one Communist party member (C1-4m), and two older men who simply eschewed the belief. (C2-3m), (C5-3m) These contributors expressed high autonomy and tolerance, but this stance did not affect their beliefs regarding filiality, nor did it create familial conflict.

Of greatest importance, it seemed, was the presence of all family members. Hùng Thủy (C4-9f) a non-Christian, was unconcerned that the eldest son, who is required to perform offerings was not willing to do this. VNE Evangelist (C4-1m) refuses to perform them, and his family does not eat the offerings. 'This is just the outward ceremony, it's not important, the important thing was presence' and 'that the ancestors are remembered'. It should, she said, 'be done generation after generation'. She showed high tolerance and autonomy in her acceptance of the passive presence of her Evangelical relatives versus their active participation.

3.12 Socialist Ideologies Leading to Innovation and Transmutative Enculturation

The new Socialist government installed in North Vietnam after 1954 orchestrated social engineering in respect to AV rites, as well in weddings, funerals, and ceremonies at the communal houses (*đình)* which were implemented very extensively across northern Vietnam after 1954, particularly, restrictions on production and consumption of food at feasts. Malarney notes that these reforms in the South were not well implemented due to open resistance by many southerners (communal and familial rites continued secretly in communal houses, which honoured lineage, family and tutelary gods). He explained changes that occurred when the governmental reforms (from 1954 until the late 1980's) were loosened:

> When the government loosened its control over production and consumption in the later 1980's… the longstanding resistance to official sumptuary restrictions began to increase in feast size for weddings funerals and death anniversary ceremonies…This transformation has been characterized by two contradictory trends. On the one hand, many of the new feasts manifest a more egalitarian character than those prior to the revolution. This is particularly true of funerals and death day ceremonies. Pre-revolutionary society had featured social cleavages between elites and commoners …Revolutionary social reforms broke down many of these barriers…in some communities a socially more expansive set of guests began attending feasts. (Malarney 2002:232)

Transmutative enculturation, seen here, produced permanent changes in social hierarchical forms. Changes affecting status and lifestyle would appear to have occurred in spite of the fact that agency could not be asserted as Socialist ideologies, dedicated to the deconstruction of Confucian societal forms, were in play. However, these transmutations governing social status were exhibited across Vietnam throughout the twentieth century, due to the gradual assimilation of Western French colonial influences, and gradually brought about the age of modernity in Vietnam. Early in the twentieth century backlash began to be seen throughout general society as a result of what was seen as an overly rigid feudal social system. (Mchale 2004; Woodside 1989) Though appearing to be forced upon the population through an overbearing political system, gradually collective agency began to assert itself, as the desire for change had already begun to affect local populations. These transmutations occurred because of agency and collective consensus: Vietnamese society saw them as improvements in societal norms

and lifestyles.

The Socialist government continues to have nearly absolute control over the entire public education system. This includes teaching moral values and virtues (*đạo đức*), as well as teaching on filiality, which is interlaced throughout the educational curriculum material. A younger pastor noted that during his schooling, educators emphasized filiality toward parents, but it is only taught as a duty: spiritual elements were left out, and filiality was described in terms of mutual obligation and gratitude:

> They explained why Vietnamese people do the LDG, that is because the children express their heart of *biết ơn* [one's obligation to show gratitude] to their [deceased] parents, but really, they don't think that the parents come back, it's just an expression of *biết ơn* or *hiếu thảo* [filial piety] to one's parents, that's all. (Pastor__C4-16m)

While this pastor believed that Vietnamese society, in general, continues to adhere to spiritual beliefs associated with deceased ancestors, this points out the dichotomy created by the government through a standardized educational curriculum. These teachings are not in conflict with traditional beliefs of returning ancestors, but the absence of the metaphysical aspect may play a part in an epistemological re-shaping for subsequent generations. This was discussed by several contributors. 'Today I don't think most young people think of the LDG as worshipping their ancestors. They just see it as a big family gathering, and when they go, it is just to re-connect with their families'. (Hàng, C4-17f) Pastor_(C7,1m) stated

> In teaching and preaching I think I help them to understand that a person who dies cannot return, there is no path for them to do that… I think that among people in Saigon, those that study don't believe these superstitions much, but in the countryside they do.

Urban areas undeniably have higher levels of education, which is greatly valued in Vietnamese society. To be civilized (*văn minh*), means to be educated. This is a Confucian ethic which has been inculcated as a Vietnamese ethos since antiquity. In the Reimer survey, several indicated that those in Vietnamese society who become *văn minh* 'no longer believe in the souls of their ancestors'. (Reimer, 1975:163) Such data indicates that Vietnamese society is moving toward a more Western empirical worldview. As higher levels of education are introduced, with moral values taught in non-religious forms

through Socialist education, the advent of global secular forms brought in through social media, and more economic independence, more pragmatic and secular approaches to AV practice may become evident.

3.13 Improvisations within Catholicism and AV Practice

In Vĩnh Long Province, Father Phúc, a Catholic priest, discussed the accepted dogma and practice of AV rites within Catholicism. Catholics are permitted to venerate deceased ancestors, although this differs both in belief as well as ritual practice within general society. In 1939 the Vatican officially allowed Catholics in Far Eastern nations to venerate ancestors, and carefully defined the parameters of accepted usage within accepted Roman Catholic doctrine. Partial accommodation in regard to AV rites produced dramatic change for all Vietnamese Catholics.

Observing at a Catholic shrine dedicated to the family lineage, I witnessed a man and woman standing in front of it, showing veneration. A lighted stick of incense and a slight bowing of the head is performed in front of a deceased relative's picture. These pictures are placed under statues of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Father Phúc (C1-15m) explained that 'lighting incense in this way is a good thing, it shows that one's heart is looking upwards towards heaven, and is not an impediment in the Catholic faith'. However, he called this a symbolic act, a way of reaching toward God, and a way of 'offering this ritual to request God's favour [*ơn*] towards those who have died'. 'The LDG', he told me, 'is a way for the family to come together, and though the deceased are no longer with [the family], their counsel is remembered by children and grandchildren'. His explanations of these beliefs show a comfortable juxtaposition of Catholic doctrine intertwined with filiality and its expression through the rites. A memorial meal [LDG] is held, but he told me, 'we don't believe that the deceased return when we hold the LDG'. (Father Phúc C1-15m) This is in line with Catholic doctrine; intercession is important for

those who have died and is done through special Catholic prayers, particularly exemplified through the practises of masses being said for them. In this way, the virtues of filiality expressed as *ơn* and *biết ơn* are preserved, along with the sacramentality of remembrance, and compatibly tied with the Catholic doctrines regarding the communion of saints. PT Nguyen states:

> According to Catholic theology, the Communion of Saints is the spiritual solidarity which binds together the faithful on earth, the souls in purgatory, and the saints in heaven in the organic unity of the Mystical body that has Christ as its head … The Church suffering is made up by those who, after death, for one reason or another, have not attained the wholeness and fullness of life that God intends for them. They need our prayers in order to complete their spiritual journey into heaven. (2007:129,131)

There are distinct differences between Catholic practice of LDG rites (which may include a mass for the deceased), funeral ceremonies, significant change in the belief system, for none believe that the dead return to communicate with the living. However, familial unity is maintained, as well as symbolic ties between the living and the dead. The belief in the communion of saints, which includes those were not ready to enter heaven, and, still suffering, may need prayer. Thus, they do not dismiss or ignore those ancestors who have never heard the Christian message, or family members who, while living, adhered to indigenous Vietnamese spiritual forms that seem incompatible with Christian beliefs.

3.13 A Filial *Habitus* Embedded with Sacred Remembrance

Among non-Christian contributors who did not think that there was a visitation of the deceased ancestor at the LDG, there was still an acknowledged element of sacredness (*thiêng liêng*) in the LDG that the contributor could not always specifically define. (C1-4m, C5-2f, C2-3m)

The rites were always described as precious, significant, and necessary by non-VNE contributors. Even those who did not believe that their ancestors returned at the LDG stressed that the LDG was ‘sacred’, ‘important’, and ‘it should be done’. (C1-2m, C1-4m, C1-5f, C2-2f, C2-3m, C4-5f, C4-9f) A female matriarch who was ambivalent regarding ancestral visitations said ‘it’s very important, I go back to my side of the family

each year [in another province] where the *nhà thờ*, [communal worship house] is, and we always have it, even four times a year if we can. I feel we must do this'. (Dương C5-2f)[47]

In 'split' families, such as the extended family of Evangelist __(C4-1m), long-term tensions were evident. The family matriarch (C4-5f) and his 70-year-old brother-in-law are not Christians, and strongly defended AV practice.

> I don't follow Buddha or any other religion, but I am happy to go to any religious events if I am invited, even the church ... The LDG is only to remember our family, which is important. It's not anything bad. We need to do it'. and, 'we should do it, and teach our children to do it. It is good and it is about "remembering", that's all, there is nothing bad about it. (Trung, C4- 6m)

Mrs Mỹ, (C2-4,f) who lived on the family farm until becoming an urban resident of Ho Chi Minh City after her marriage, described with great clarity the ideals associated with the LDG: love and family unity, but beneath this, a 'looking to the source', what may be termed the 'sacrality of remembrance':

> This [AV rite] is important because without [my husband's] parents, I would not have my husband. I love him, her takes care of me, so I must respect his parents. If people value you, you should also value them, if they love you, you must love them back, if they don't love you, then you don't love them back. Once life is over, it cannot be repeated, if there is not love for [his] family, then [the meaning is] that I don't love my husband.

These brief statements, imbued with the need and desire to 'remember our ancestors', 'teach it to our children', indicate a high obligation to remember and honour (Trung, C4-6m), as well as affection, all wrapped around the sacral trait, 'looking to the source'. The ritual of the LDG expressed non-material enculturated traits and expressions of collective familial filiality. Contributors mentioned 'looking to the source' in various ways, as the remembrance of one's ancestors and village heroes from antiquity in the community *đình.* (Son, C-11m) Such responses clearly show the filial disposition in regard to communal AV practices, beyond immediate and extended family. 'Looking to the source' the sacrality of remembrance, is inculcated into the ethical disposition of filiality and this expression is seen in the performance of the LDG. Trương, a VNE scholar, describes

[47] She did however, in the same interview (C5-2f, 2015) state that when she was ill, she had prayed to Ông Trời and also called out to her parents to help her, so she certainly believed in the immortality of the soul.

succinctly both the efficacy and the filial/ sacramental dispositions associated with the rites:

> In order to be a good human being, one must, first and foremost, treat one's parents well. Traditional Vietnamese people believe that "Human beings have ancestors and origins, as trees have roots, as rivers have sources" ("*Con người có tổ có tông, như cây có cội như sông có nguồn*"). Human beings come into existence not by themselves, nor by accident; they are born. Thus, it is one's human duty to be grateful to those who have brought one into the world; one must take care of one's elders and ancestors by paying homage to them and giving them food. For traditional Vietnamese people, it is an ethical and moral duty for a person to love, honor, and worship his/her ancestors, including one's parents, regardless of whether they are dead or alive. Nguyễn Đình Chiểu (1822-1888), a blind man and one of the great scholars and poets of Vietnam, writes in his famous epic, *Lục Vân Tiên*, *[I] would rather be blind but keep the WAY (ĐẠO) OF FAMILY, than have eyes and not worship ancestors.* [sic] (2009: 25)

VNEs, as does Trương, acknowledge and accept the sacrality of remembrance as 'looking to the source'. He indicates a strong sympathy with this stance; VNEs, it will be seen, also continue to express filial dispositions.

3.14 Analysis of the Data

Data in this research indicates that those contributors who perform AV rites are not interested in any rigid dogmas regarding the deceased, but are chiefly focused upon the ethical disposition of filial duty. The efficacy of the rites lies in the filial expressions of mutual obligation (*ơn*, and *biết ơn*) for filiality (*hiếu*) which encompasses the values of one's obligation as well as 'looking to the source', or the 'sacrality of remembrance'. Any extended family unit in this research could be comprised of folk Buddhists, formal Buddhists, Catholics, unaffiliated, and occasionally, VNE members. (Lạc, C2-1f) A striking amount of tolerance was in evidence among the contributors in these families. The 'Three Religions, One Source' concept is illustrated here. (Jamieson 1991:6) Whom one followed and worshipped was a highly individual decision. The fluidity of the group is in evidence, for one's personal beliefs were not considered a requisite to the maintaining of the grid components which enforce societal and hierarchical boundaries. (Douglas 1970) The grid components of patriarchal society have distinctly weakened over the last one hundred years, leading to some dismay and concerns for the disintegration of society (Nguyen, KV 1994; Nguyen 2012:382-402), yet, ancestral

practices continue unabated in spite of indications of weakening Confucian traditions and hierarchical patriarchal forms. (Taylor 2007:19; Jellema 2007)

Transmutative enculturation has occurred, at least in some settings, through the implementation of Socialist reforms in terms of social hierarchy pertaining to AV rites, and in Buddhist and Catholic dogma and practice, improvisations have occurred through gradual accommodation or through deliberate inculturation methods[48] which were comfortable for everyone. This accommodation and the improvisations were easily implemented and performed within familial settings, in which there is high autonomy. Buddhist dogma states that souls either continue to re-incarnate, or enter paradise; lingering in this world is not desired. Buddhism and Catholicism diametrically differ in their understanding of where the souls of the dead reside, however, each has been able to, through appropriation and accommodation, accept and persist in AV practice. It is clear that Catholic and Buddhist systems of belief are definitely at odds, in some respects with traditional AV rites, but improvisations in each have brought about compatible appropriation, or accommodation. As such, Catholic and Buddhist contributors' responses did not reflect any internal conflict in discussions of the rites, versus responses by VNEs, who often admitted that dealing with all issues surrounding AV rites was quite problematic. (C7-2f; C8-3f; C8-2m; C4-16m 2015; C4-12f)

The most significant conclusion obtained through this primary data is that while outward presentation as well as spiritual practice have been adjusted through personal agency and improvisation, the non-material traits associated with filiality (*ơn, biết ơn*) and fulfilling one's duties as a person, (*đạo làm người*) were never modified or abandoned. The ethical disposition of filiality continued to be emulated, revered and adhered to within all religious fields; Buddhist, Catholic and Socialist policies governing religious practice. VNE beliefs regarding AV rites indicate no improvisation, though

[48] Buddhist dogma in support of filiality is quite ancient, see (Schopen 2007).

limited accommodation may be seen. (Chapter Four)

Responses from numerous contributors are indicative of *habitus* that shape Vietnamese spiritual schemes of thought and embodied practice. Bourdieu describes the rules of honour among Kabylian males in an Algerian village. 'What is called the *sense of honour* is nothing other than the cultivated disposition, inscribed in the body schema and in the schemes of thought'. (1977:15) *Hiếu* (filiality) comprised of the non-material traits of *ơn,* and *biết ơn* to one's parents and deceased lineage as the cycle of mutual obligation (gift exchange) is an ethical disposition (Bourdieu 1977:165) inscribed in the body schema and the schemes of thought within a disposition cultivated from birth collectively. While this inscribed ethical disposition may at times be overlaid with superstitious beliefs about the harming the living family, hungry ghosts, and so forth, its non-material traits associated with filiality are the key to understanding ancestral practices. (Nguyen D 2016:12-13)

3.15 Conclusion: 'Looking to the Source' as the Sacrality of Remembrance

This Confucian proverb is taught to every Vietnamese child: *Công Cha như núi Thái Sơn, nghĩa Mẹ như nước trong nguồn chạy ra. Một lòng thờ Mẹ kính Cha, cho tròn chú hiếu mới là đạo con* (The debt we owe our father is as great as Mount Thai Son; the debt we owe our mother is as inexhaustible as water flowing from its source. We must repay our filial debt in order to fulfil our obligations as children), as well as the proverb stating, 'When drinking water, remember its source'. Remembering the source (*nhớ về nguồn*) is the central moral principle that teaches filial piety regarding ancestors, inculcated as an ethical disposition, (the trait of filiality) and must necessarily be expressed in filial acts that actualizes one's morality toward family and lineage. Filial obligation demonstrated as the trait of sacrality of remembrance is so powerful that even those who do not believe that the ancestors return due to secular, Buddhist or Catholic influence demonstrate this embodied disposition. For those, the efficacy of the rites is not seen in terms of spiritual

power, but is critical in the need for continued gift exchange (Mauss 1970; Phan 2003), returning *ơn* to those who gave one life (remembering the source) and tied to irrevocably to the fulfilling of one's moral, filial obligations. Song also states that 'we can even go so far as to say that the perpetuation of memory is the perpetuation of life ... our physical life is short but memory is eternal'. (Song 1980:144-45) He, as an East Asian, also embodies the disposition (*habitus*) of the sacrality of remembrance. Song tells us, 'memory is the receptacle of divine revelation, which enables us to speak of the sacramental meaning of memory'. (Song 1980:146) This sacrality of remembrance as seen through AV rites functions also provides a means of establishing familial place, both on a personal level (knowing one's place within one's lineage), communally and possibly on a national level. (Jellema 2007) This eternal quality has been sacralised by Vietnamese in terms of ancestors, heroes, kings and other significant leaders (Hồ Chí Minh), going beyond lineage, and in earlier generations, toward the emperor. The emperor, in turn, expressed the trait of filiality toward Ông Trời, the highest spiritual being in a Vietnamese cosmology, an expression of remembering the source. In the community *đình* re-established in Hồ Chí Minh City after 1954, the seven villagers of Hành Thiên village of Nam Dinh province martyred 700 years ago are venerated. I asked one of the elders present, 'why do you continue to remember them after all this time?' His immediate answer was, 'because we must remember the source'. (Son, C1-11m) He gave no other explanation, for, to him, none was needed. Those who had done great deeds for his village in North Vietnam must be remembered in perpetuity, for to remember is the perpetuation of life, and thus, is sacred. 'The significance of a Confucian ancestral rite lies in fulfilling one's filial duties by remembering one's ancestors, rewarding the origin, and repaying favours given by the ancestors'. (Ch'oe 1988:39) This concise summation of the sacrality of remembrance and the obligatory moral expression of *ơn* and *biết ơn* express that remembrance. Giving thanks for those who gave one life cannot be an idolatrous act, and

may point to a higher Source, for it is God who has given everyone life. As Jamieson stated previously, 'Three Religions, one source'; these three religions 'look to the source'. (Jamieson 1991:6) AV practice, whether syncretized with Buddhism or Taoism still 'looks to the source'. I posit that 'looking to the source' is a sacramental trait inculcated into filiality, termed the 'sacrality of remembrance'. This is deeply rooted in a Vietnamese ontology, and in a Vietnamese *habitus.* Examination of VNE ritual practice will determine whether this sacrality of remembrance continues to be seen in bodily mediated action, and whether the inculcated trait of filiality is constant despite overt changes in behaviour, practice and belief.

Chapter Four

Vietnamese Evangelical Response to the Lễ Đám Giỗ

4.1 Explanation

This section will provide descriptions as well as subsequent descriptive analysis detailing the conflicts between Vietnamese Evangelical (VNE) belief and practice, and the practice of the indigenous ancestral practice (AV) with emphasis on the dispositions of, and those related to filial piety (*hiếu*), one's moral obligations (*ơn*) and obligation to show gratitude (*biết ơn*), which continues beyond the grave as sacred remembrance. (Toan Anh 1969:40–89, Phan KB 1915:25–26)

Eating offered food (*đồ cúng*) is a complicated issue for VNEs, for this involves table fellowship with extended non-Christian family and the refusal to eat offered food leads to a terrible quandary, not only in terms of social courtesies dictated by Vietnamese society, but one seen as lacking in filial piety (*bất hiếu*), and a serious deficit of moral duty to one's ancestors, *(hiếu*) which is expressed through the disposition of mutual obligation (*ơn* and *biết ơn)* (gift exchange). (Mauss 1970) There is stringent opposition to this within VNE community, for the rites are considered an idolatrous practice. VNE dogma takes an antithetical position toward the practice, placing them in direct opposition to other family members. Responses from this data showed typical rejectionist responses toward prohibitions on offered food, resulting in conformity patterns that lend to a collective VNE identity in terms of group inclusion, except for a small number of responses from a marginalized minority, in which social inclusion was not necessary. This range of responses is examined, as well as the effects of the prohibition in shaping VNE ecclesiology and practice.

Modifications in the VNE stance toward abstinence are discussed. These indicate a 'move toward the centre' that is, some form of limited participation (accommodation) that placate family members and does not cause offence. These accommodations are

discussed in the light of the filial dispositions of all Vietnamese.

4.2 Background

Attending the LDG requires a large communal meal with particular social behaviour and courtesies, but in particular, an expression of repayment of moral, that is, filial obligation, as part of the central virtue of *hiếu* (filial piety). (Jamieson 1995:16-17) VNE contributors discussed situations in which the refusal to eat brought on anger, verbal shaming, and actual beating. Refusal to attend, and/or direct refusal to eat the food that had been directly placed on the AV altar, is seen as being *bất hiếu*, a very grave offence. (C4-15m, C7-1-2fm) The VNE position is diametrically oppositional: most VNE contributors I spoke with felt that eating offered food was a sin,[49] placing them in a serious quandary.The lighting of incense while bowing the head, or knees (*thập lai*) are of course, absolutely forbidden as well.[50] Along with food offerings, lighted incense sticks to any spirit beings (including ancestors) are an overt act of worship, as Mrs Khanh (C1-1f) stated, 'when they light the incense, that is worship'. These actions are not as difficult to avoid for two reasons: in the LDG, only the eldest son[51] is designated to light incense and bow in front of the altar. In some LDG ceremonies, there was no bowing at all, only waving incense sticks in front of the altar. Women do not always have to do this unless they wish to, depending on each family's chosen tradition and interpretation. One's status in the family is important in this regard. Younger children also do not always participate, although two contributors mentioned that it was the oldest son, and the youngest child (of either gender) who would bow before the altar, and light incense. (C2-1f, MC_4f)[52] Age, hierarchical

[49] VNEs never indicated that breaking the food prohibition had salvific connotations. Some years ago, one of my co-workers told me the story of her father: 'my father became a Christian before he died. He never stopped worshipping the ancestors, and he wasn't baptized, but I think he really believed'. (Journal 8, 2015:10).
[50]Discussed in Lesson Eight of the *Giáo Lý Căn Bản* from the HTGL-C4 congregation.
[51] There are exceptions to this when the eldest son is absent.
[52] In the ceremonies I saw, 'bowing' was simply an inclination of the head, not a 'kowtow' as is sometimes thought; forms of bowing seem to depend on the inclination of individual families. This was also the case in an LDG ceremony I witnessed at the Community Dinh. (C1_Video_2)

status and gender are major factors in standing before the altar. Food offerings and table fellowship are another matter, of course. This is a practice in which everyone partakes. In most cultures, refusing to eat from certain dishes would be designated offensive, and in a familial ritual in which filiality is the central virtue, the offense is of the highest nature. VNEs have developed ways of trying to deal with the issue in as appropriate a manner as possible within the limited parameters of VNE dogma and hermeneutics.

4.3 VNE Responses to the Food Prohibition

Mrs Hàng, a young woman of 25, was raised in a Christian home, and was married to a youth leader in the church. Her response to the conflict of eating offered food was a common one. She acknowledged that some of her relatives were weak (*yếu đuổi)*, as they would eat offered food at the LDG ceremonies. 'Those who continue to worship and eat the offerings, don't seem to be real Christians. I think they just come to church and follow a tradition. The ones who really have faith won't eat the offering', she told me. Yet, paradoxically, she noted that the LDG is losing its efficacy in terms of spiritual elements: 'Young people today just think of it as a time to get together and have a big meal with the family. I don't think they see it as something very important or spiritual'. (Hàng, C4-10f)

A few VNEs saw the food itself as having actual spiritual contamination. Several indicated that it felt dirty. Thảo noted that 'you won't die if you eat it, but God would certainly not be pleased'. (C4-3f) Her sister, Quyên, told me that she would feel terrible if she ate the offerings accidentally, and that it was important to ask forgiveness of sin before taking the LTT. Speaking hypothetically, she noted 'if you had eaten any offerings (*đồ cúng*) and then participated in the *Lễ Tiệc Thánh* [LTT, or Lord's Supper], it would be terrible'. (C4-3f) In these cases, eating the food, evidences a materiality, for to eat it was to contaminate oneself and give up one's freedom (agency) possibly to demonic

beings. (Keane 2007) In these cases, eating food offered to a deceased ancestor was compared oppositionally with participation in the LTT, reminiscent of 1 Corinthians 10:20-21. Among some other contributors, this was implied, but not stated directly.

Another couple in this church (C4-HTGL) stressed that they were very careful when attending the LDG of the wife's relatives, and when what would occur if one accidentally ate from a dish of offered food responded, 'we would never make a mistake, we know exactly which dishes to eat from'. (C4-7m-8f) Fear was associated with the accidental eating of the offered food, and, in the cases above, produced visceral feelings of contamination. Missionary emeritus Helen Douglas served in the Mekong Delta area as a missionary teacher in the 1960s. By this time, the food tabu was already quite entrenched: 'we could go to the AV ceremonies, if we were invited. We usually went with Vietnamese Christians, but were careful only to eat what they told us to, because they knew exactly what was okay to eat …' (MC-4f) She does however, indicate some leeway: 'if you were given food that you were not sure about, you could eat it, and didn't need to question it'. While the first part of her description is typical of responses, the second part was never stated by any VNEs. Descriptions from most lay members and leaders particularly did not include this flexibility. Committed VNEs offered few circumstances in which it was acceptable to eat offered food, even if taken accidentally (C4-7,8mf, 2014), for it is considered a tabu. (C1-14m, C4-11f) Younger Christians such as Khanh (C1-1f), and Lạc (C2-1f), did not seem to have such a strong repugnance to the idea of eating offered food, though each felt it was not right. Trang, (who became a Christian as an adult) did not feel a sense of contamination: when I asked her how she would feel if she accidentally ate offered food at an LDG responded, 'I don't think it would be a sin, if you didn't know, right?' C5-1f)

Two female contributors, Thảo, (C4-3f) and Thu (Wise, Journal 8 2015), were asked about any possible similarities between the LTT and the LDG, (for both are

memorial meals), and explained, with horror, that one can never talk about the AV rites and the LTT together, as they are completely different from one another. These contributors were both either born into a VNE home, or came into the Christian faith as a child. Comparisons within the LDG and the LTT have been noted by scholars (KS Nguyen 2017:290) (Lee, 2008) (CS Song, 1980: 152-157), but VNEs, due to these prohibitions, and a reified presentation of the LTT, are not able to see the correlations in terms of memorial meals.

Some VNEs felt that accidentally partaking would not produce bad results; the food had no power to bring negative consequences or contamination, and no VNE leaders alluded to this in any way, thus, did not see it signifying materiality. This may be due to the fact most pastors seemed to realize that it would be impossible to enforce a standard of complete abstinence. Two pastor contributors interviewed mentioned that there could be cases, particularly for wives of non-believing husbands, in which the wife felt forced to eat offerings. One pastor reluctantly said, 'well if it is a severe case, it could be accepted'. (C4-15m) Another mentioned that some wives would do this, but 'they wouldn't if they were willing to count the cost and that eating offered food was a rarity in his church, for 'these believers are very strong'. (Pastor__C3-7m) While pastors did not like to admit that this could be a problem, none of them saw the food itself as causing contamination, but hints of materiality are in evidence, due to the fear of contacting evil spirits.

4.3.1 Justification for Refusing to Eat: A Defensive Wall against Connections with Evil Spirits

VNE behaviour supported a literal interpretation of 1 Corinthians 10:20, 'but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons'. The passage describes the story of the Golden Calf and the eating of idol food. One VNE pastor paraphrased the discussion from 1 Corinthians 10

as dogma for necessary abstinence of eating offered food, (C2-5m) and in a number of conversations, the problem of making connections with evil spirits (demons) arose.[53] Several leaders made statements such as this one: [eating food from the altar] 'is related to demonic activity. If you eat that, you could easily come in contact with evil spirits'. (C8-2m) In my early years as a missionary in Vietnam, I questioned the eating of this food, and two Vietnamese pastors immediately told me that they had witnessed people who ate these offerings becoming demon possessed. (Journal 8 2015:12) Many lay members also believed that eating could expose one to demonic activity, reminiscent of these verses. This dogma is certainly taught in churches (although I never saw it in any written documents), for it was a commonly stated conviction in interviews. Idolatry is associated with eating food offered to idols; this connection comes from an interpretation of the passage of 1 Corinthians 10:6-7. Pastors (C4-15m, C4-11f) also mentioned that eating offered food could open a door to contact with demonic forces. These pastors, as did the Calvinist missionaries among the Sumba, (Keane 2007: 237-241) also appeared in some conflict; reluctant to adhere to a fully materialist dynamic, (for modern thought would eschew the idea of food actually containing demonic power, or such agency), yet attempting to preserve the dogmas of prohibition, and genuine sincerity, in believing that eating these offerings could, in some way be harmful, as well as damaging to both individual and collective community witness.

A dramatic account was given by a 50-year-old female VNE leader, who spent several years in a Buddhist temple in her youth, chanting prayers for the dead. Her Christian testimony included the account of being saved from committing suicide after hearing voices telling her to kill herself. She received deliverance through Christian workers, stopped all activity in the temples, including eating all offerings (*đồ cúng*) and became a Christian. However, shortly thereafter, she 'felt tempted' and ate it once.

[53] In a study done by QHL Nguyen, one contributor also quotes these verses as a justification for not eating. (2013:181)

According to her, the demons re-entered her and she had to seek deliverance from these a second time. She believes that the offerings in temples are very dangerous, for, in her estimation, the reason the 'the monks never eat this [food] … is because they know that the food has been offered to demons'. (C2-6f) Although Buddhist practice and AV rites have very different purposes, she conflated the two, seeing offered food in both settings as efficacious acts that could invite evil spirits to possess one. It is a common practice to have LDG ceremonies in a temple, and these can be performed whether or not the families were professing Buddhists; it is easy to understand why VNEs see these as analogous. Her prayers in the temple were to the dead, and she believed that eating offerings at an LDG is also a way of connecting with the dead; such beliefs were common among VNEs. A VNE professor, born into the home of two generations of VNE pastors, was always taught (as described in 1 Corinthians 10) that offered food was given to demons. After spending some years in academia in the United States, he returned to Vietnam and attended the LDG of his wife's non-Christian family. He was very impressed with the prayer to the ancestors recited by his father-in-law, who 'ordered the demons to leave' as 'these offerings are for the ancestors'. (C8-4m) This significantly changed his views on AV rites. VNEs sincerely believe that eating offered food is a very efficacious act, albeit a negative one, and not just a superstition. Although non-VNE contributors differed on ancestral presence, as actual or symbolic, prohibitions practiced by VNE contributors indicated belief in materiality, for the food could open one to being harmed.

When discussing the AV rites and traditional beliefs, most VNEs simply assumed that all members of non-Christian families believed in the presence of the ancestors; (C3-1f), misrecognition was at times, in evidence (Bourdieu, 1977:5) due to differing underlying semiotic ideologies. (Keane 2007) Only in the cases of Trang (C5-1f) and Khanh (C1-1f) were they aware that non-VNEs held differing viewpoints; even then, neither of these female contributors participated in food offerings due to the prohibitions

surrounding them. Mrs Lạc (C2-1f) also stated that her mother 'ate food offered to dead people'. Yet, when I interviewed the mother of Mrs Lạc, she made no mention of her own deceased mother having any material needs, rather, she simply wanted to remember her. (Trung C2-2f) Certainly, this misrecognition in understanding the actual views of non-Christian members played a role in a very unbending VNE hermeneutic and orthopraxis.

Traditions related to the AV rites are all placed within 'one basket' along with prohibitions in the first and second commandments on idol worship and its dangers. VNEs never attempted to justify participation in AV rites, or justify eating offered food from the passage in 1 Corinthians 8: 4-8, which could allow some form of participation in table fellowship.[54] The prohibitions always stemmed from verses in the Old Testament and were linked, most commonly, to the first and second Commandment. All AV practice is tied to pervasive teachings on idolatry, and to the teachings in 1 Corinthians 10. These are now deeply embedded within the VNE ethos pertaining to the authority of Scripture, and have been perpetrated for one hundred years. VNEs, trying to navigate through and realign Vietnamese cosmology, a vast array of spirit-beings and practices, attempt to bring it into proper order by delineating that all practices, even those regarding their personal lineage, must be placed outside the margins in order to avoid this danger, and do this in all sincerity. Much of this fear may be due to the fact that, in most homes (including those I visited), the AV altars and other religious altars (as to Quan Âm or Buddha) would be placed next to each other. The apparent syncretism or parallelism of these practices clearly influenced VNE leaders in development of orthopraxis; thus, fear and prohibition dominate their beliefs and actions toward AV rites.[55]

[54] 1 Cor. 8:4,8: '…about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and there is no God but one…But food does not bring us near to God, we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do'. (NIV)

[55] While outside the scope of this study, a northern Vietnamese woman who migrated to Canada as a child became a Christian in college. While studying 1 Corinthians 8-10 in a Bible Study, she determined that participating in AV rites and spiritually based ceremonies was what was causing her to have nightmares. She stopped staying in her parent's home (where the altars were) overnight and did not eat the food from the altar and the nightmares stopped. However, in later years, she says, she just prays over the food before she eats it during the LDG. She has never had contact with VNE churches inside Vietnam.

To show how deeply this tabu controls VNE beliefs, Mai, a 50-year-old widow, (C3-1f) became a Christian just after her husband did, who died several years later. After his death she began conducting a Christian version of the LDG, or a *lễ kỳ niệm*, (LKN) in her home every year on his death anniversary. She cooks a large meal (shouldering the costs) and invites her husband's relatives who attend willingly. Fearful that his relatives would see his picture hanging in the living room and worship it, she said, 'I put my picture next to his. Since I am living, they won't worship either of us'. (Mai C1-3f) During my interview with her non-Christian sister-in-law, I observed the family altar on the top floor of her home and noticed Mai's deceased husband's picture hung on a sidewall and not standing on the altar. Hạnh told me, 'My brother told us before his death that he did not want offerings, so we respected that'. (Hạnh C3-5 2015) Mai (C1-3f) never knew this throughout her long contact with her in-laws, for she had never seen the altar. The tabu toward any seeming idolatry concealed from her the tolerance expressed by her non-Christian family members toward her husband.

4.3.2 Dematerialization and Misrecognition as a Defensive Barrier

VNEs, as do many Evangelicals, including their missionary forbears, embrace an interpretation of Scripture that includes belief in demonic activity. Yet, logic and empiricism is also seen and used as a justification for the prohibitions. This seems to be a common tactic used in numerous missional contexts to thwart and deny practices seen as both superstitious and/or morally wrong. For example, a senior pastor stated, 'It is very common for people have a superstition that if they do not eat the offerings, they will be unlucky [*bị xui xẻo*]. We have to explain this to them'. (C3-7m) However, no non-VNEs contributors in this study mentioned this issue at all. Many mentioned the food only in terms of the living, or that it was not important, but presence at the ceremony was key. (Hùng Thủy, C4-10f, 2015) Gái (C5-4f) stated that she would be just as happy to eat the [unoffered] food from the kitchen, instead of the altar.

VNEs are taught and firmly believe that dead people cannot communicate in any way with the living. As Mr Bữu said: 'I think it is … ok to go, as long as you don't eat the offered food. That is a sin, after all, how can a dead person come back to eat food?' (C1-9m) Often VNEs stressed that 'this is a lot of superstition' in interviews. In dealing with the outside world, they were, however, careful to show a harmonious face. I noted this in various family visits during the Lunar New Year, for instance, when VNEs met with their non-VNE relatives (Journal 1,2015:3), but in private interviews, some stated openly that they felt themselves to be in a morally superior position. VNEs would laugh off the belief that 'the ancestors need to be fed', as Mrs Lạc told me: 'I heard a pastor preach to those who want to eat at the AV feasts: "what would you do if you heard the knives and forks clinking when the ancestors came back to eat? You would be terrified and run away!"' (Lạc C2-1f) Rational empiricism gives psychological weight to their case that AV rites must be avoided at all costs. This undergirding empirical thought almost seems to become part of Christian dogma, as Mr Bữu stated: 'it is a sin to eat that food, for how can a dead person eat?' C1-9m). Miss Dũng, 25-years-old, and a very new Christian, told me that at her grandfather's funeral, she regretted bowing to him, for 'it is just a dead body'. After she returned from the funeral, her mentor explained this to her, and she was obviously repeating her mentor's viewpoint. (C4-12f) VNE dogma pushes members toward an empiricism (that is, modernity) (Keane, 2007) which becomes part of the hermeneutic for maintaining the wall of separation.[56] A VNE leader, who is invited back to his province for the LDG each year, and has seen drunken and hypocritical behaviour attached to it, stated:

> I only feel concern for the living, not the dead, in my beliefs, someone who dies without God has lost everything, so you must believe in God, if you don't you lose everything. For those who have already died, worshipping [with offerings] does nothing at all. In my opinion, it's just a waste of money, but I always keep filial piety. (C8-2m)

[56] Similar arguments were used by early Jesuits, particularly De Rhodes, who took a very empirical stance in arguing against the burning of votive paper objects at the LDG. (Phan 1998:95)

However, these two viewpoints are in opposition, for, if the LDG is simply superstition, and the dead cannot be there, why is eating the food an efficacious action? The answer seems to be that this opens the door for demons to receive the offerings, thus, giving credence to the passage in 1 Corinthians 10. Through this defensive barrier, and using Scripture, VNEs support their case for never eating offered food. Dematerialization of practices perceived as signifying materiality in the LDG were overtly embraced and stated clearly in interviews when describing AV rites.

Misrecognition was also common in the VNE interpretation of food offerings 'offered to demons', which, in looking through primary data in this research, seemed unwarranted. Among these non-VNE contributors, none described specific practices signifying materiality in regard to offered food, and only some alluded to the presence of the ancestors at the event. Non-VNEs were ambivalent as to their presence, so at least, in some cases, offerings of food were symbolic acts. This weakening of practices signifying materiality in terms of objects (food) is probably due to the long-term forces of modernity and Socialist ideologies which have affected Southern Vietnamese society in the later twentieth century. However, dedicated VNEs had no nuanced approach in such circumstances, and considered all food from altars unequivocally unclean. (Keane 2007: 237-241)

VNEs have no teachings or doctrinal stance on what happens to those who die without hearing the gospel message, and several VNEs stated that they thought their unbelieving ancestors were in hell (C5-1f) (Journal_8, 2015:10) which would, for a VNE, preclude any necessity for giving offerings, showing respect or gratitude, or even wishing to remember them. This is not the case for Buddhists or Catholics, both of whom use forms of intercession for the dead that are seen as efficacious in aiding them. In the early part of the twentieth century, Lê Văn Thái, an early, and very well-known VNE pastor, wrote in his memoirs of his initial struggle with the abandonment of the ancestral rites

and the importance of the ancestral genealogy in his own family. The defence utilized by the Vietnamese evangelist was that Vietnamese were commanded in ancient documents to worship back to the tenth generation. However, he came to question this, for what about the generations previous to this? How could all of them be remembered? The passages in 1 Corinthians were not mentioned at all, rather, the evangelist who led him to faith in Christ focused on a defence of Christianity reliant on a logical argument, versus an emotional one. He came to believe that stopping the rites would not be sinful behaviour, for worshipping ancestors was not rational. (Lê 1971:14-18) Again, note the reference to carefully crafted rational argument, versus the implied, illogical stance of those in general society. His embrace of a Western epistemology over the demands of tradition was a necessary step for him to embrace the Christian faith.

4.3.3 VNE Self-Policing

The food prohibition for VNEs in regard to the AV rites is reinforced through teaching and self-policing. This includes policing the circumstances, if necessary, but in the main, careful avoidance is used to make sure that no offered food is consumed. Mrs Khanh, a new believer stated

> I learned the Bible from my Bible Study Fellowship class,[57] when we studied the Old Testament, which talks about not worshipping idols … my [Western] teachers never talked about the AV rites but when I was reading the Bible one day, I felt that it wasn't right to participate, so I didn't do it … However, there is so much food there, so I just don't choose the food that has been placed on the altar. (C1-1f)

Some were not strong enough to carry this out, as, for example, in the case of Miss Dũng, a young unmarried female of 25, (C4-12f) who migrated from North Vietnam with her family. After becoming a Christian (but not yet baptized), she attended a colleague's funeral and unwittingly participated in the AV ceremonies. When she told her Christian mentor, she was instructed that Scripture forbids all AV practices. Immediately thereafter, she found out that her grandfather in North Vietnam had died, and upon going to the

[57] Bible Study Fellowship (BSF) is an international Evangelical bible study group that is usually taught in the English language by Christian expatriates.

funeral, she felt pressured to perform AV rites of bowing and eating. Interviewed shortly thereafter, she expressed doubts about her dedication. 'It was wrong; I know it was, and I did it, even though I already knew this'. If one didn't know that the practices were forbidden, she indicated, one didn't have responsibility. If one is aware of this prohibition, and participated willingly, there is intent to participate in a form of idolatry. She told me, 'it was a sin, really a sin, but I asked God to forgive me'. At this point, her faith was already wavering, for she told me, 'I feel I came to God so fast. It was too fast, and now my faith is being tested …' (C4-12f) Compounded by personal problems from her past, she disappeared from the local church. A year later her mentor told me she could no longer reach her by phone. The bar for inclusion was placed so high that Dũng had little chance of continued adherence to VNE dogma.

4.3.4 Avoidance Tactics

VNEs tactics for abstinence included avoidance. These avoidance issues, especially for those in the ministry were stricter than for the average VNE: if one was seen attending an LDG ceremony, one's reputation (*ủy tín*) could be lost within the VNE community. VNEs not only have to avoid the offered food, but VNE men do not drink alcohol, a staple at every LDG. While this is not a problem for women, men have great difficulty in not offending other male relatives. A 40-year-old VNE leader (C8-2m) stated, 'every year my siblings and relatives invite me to go come back for the LDG for my father, but I never do, because the whole thing is just a big drinking party'. Young woman Mrs Lạc noted that the end of the LDG each year always ended with someone fighting, due to alcohol: 'there's never peace! … I wish one year it would be peaceful'. (C2-1f) She always asks her husband not to sit with the men, since they constantly try to force her abstaining husband to drink with them, however this also causes complications. In traditional societies women and men often spend most of their time with their own gender. VNEs

see this as another valid reason to avoid or refuse attending, as did Pastor ___. (C4-16m, 2015) They believed that these are really just excuses for big drinking parties, or for 'showing off'. (C4-3f, 2015) Their rationale was that this did not express genuine filiality, and the dead were not genuinely honoured, thus it was a false expression that need not be supported.

4.3.5 VNE Leaders: Enforcing the Boundaries of Table Fellowship

The rules for leaders in their interaction with the LDG were certainly higher than for the average person. Senior pastor (C4-15m) felt that if a leader continued to eat offered food at ceremonies, 'there must be disciplinary measures'. (C4-15m) However, it is unlikely anyone who attained such a position would ever entertain such behaviour. No VNE contributing leaders felt that it was possible to sever all ties with AV rites (at least in terms of presence); limited movement toward accommodation was in evidence. This form of accommodation was taught from the pulpit in the case of congregation (HTQP-C2), whose pastor gave specific instructions, for example, carefully followed by young female contributor Lạc, (C2-1f), as to the necessity of requesting and eating from a separate tray.

Most pastors and leaders acknowledged that they had, at least at times, gone to the LDG of non-Christian relatives, especially if it was their immediate family. In many cases, it was almost impossible not to, if one does not want to be seen as lacking in filial piety, which no one was willing to accede to. QHL Nguyen notes, 'Filial piety, as expressed in ancestor worship, is thus an integral part of being a moral person in Vietnamese culture'. (2013:181) All VNEs without exception, saw filiality as a necessary moral virtue. When I questioned the focus groups (Focus Group 1-3, December 2016) about filial piety, all leaders present continued to practice filiality, re-interpreted however, within VNE dogmas.

The strictest interpretation was carried out by the senior Pastor__(C3-7m) of (HTTL-C3), a large urban congregation, who told me that he avoided attending the LKN

(*lễ kỳ niệm*) ceremony, held by his Christian siblings as a remembrance of the day that his parents became Christians. He implied that this avoidance was associated with his status as a church leader and could give leeway for average members who wished to attend their own family LDGs. In this instance, though rare, pastoral status triumphed over filial behaviour, though, significantly, his siblings were Christians, and could excuse his presence.

On the other hand, Mrs Phương (CVK-2f) church worker and wife of an associate pastor of the largest HTTL congregation in Vietnam told me, without hesitation that, 'Christians should go to the LDG. They shouldn't eat the food, but they should compromise a little, otherwise how will their relatives want to hear the gospel?' This is almost an about-face from past decades when most VNEs were forbidden to go, or it was so frowned upon that many did not want to risk being seen as participating in idolatrous rites. Mr Bữu, at 67 years of age and the child of a VNE pastor, told me: 'as children we could never go to an LDG. But now, I have re-thought that, and I would go'. (C1-9m) In another case, a leader's wife (C8-3f) stated that she was told over and over in church that she should not attend. Later in life, she did begin going along with her husband, a VNE leader. After the long separation, the non-Christian relatives, his wife told me, were very willing to prepare a tray of unoffered food for them.

The senior pastor of the (HTGL-C4) church goes yearly to the LDG of his father-in-law, who, though believing in Christ on his deathbed, is still remembered with an LDG rite by his non-believing family every year. The pastor said, 'I must go, if not, this is *bất hiếu*, [lacking in filial piety]. However, because they respect me, they will prepare special food for me. If not, I will go and greet everyone, to show respect … but, I make sure my children and I are somewhere else when they begin eating'. (C4-15m) While using non-offensive avoidance techniques, he has also built respect in regard to his personal expression of filiality that was respected by his non-Christian relatives. He also stated,

‘my relatives see that my family and I lead good moral lives, so they accept our convictions [of abstinence from food offerings]’. ‘The most important thing is that everyone is present’ as contributor (Hung Thuy C4-9f), stated proves true here, for presence seems to be an efficacious part of the AV ritual, itself an expression of filiality. He won the respect of his non-Christian extended family and was able through limited accommodation, to continue to adhere to his Christian convictions.

Another pastor, having had a good deal of contact with approaches from Asian societies outside of Vietnam, said that he had adapted his approach to teaching on AV rites. ‘I would say to a new believer, you should request, very respectfully to be allowed to abstain, but if your parents don’t agree, you can participate. Keep doing this gradually, until they agree’. (C1-14m_Focus Group 3) This approach, of course, gives the fifth Commandment precedence over the first and second. Only this pastor contributor discussed such an approach. While leaders feel deeply about enforcing these prohibitions, and state the party line in very concrete terms, they seemed to feel they were waging a losing battle. Many new believers drop out before baptism, for example, Miss Dũng. (C4-12f, 2015) Female Pastor ___(C4-12f) told me she was not sure if some in her church were abstaining absolutely from AV rites, for, she said, ‘we are not sure what they do at home’. She felt that to eat this food was a greater sin than smoking or drinking, because it had to do with idols. Contributors (C4-6m, 7f), the brother and sister-in-law of an evangelist in this church also implied that some church members did not abstain from offerings. Leaders feel insecure and are forced to teach rules reminiscent of Mosaic food laws to police the boundaries of inclusion and prohibition, diminishing other teachings on freedom in Christ.

4.3.6 Persecution as a Price for Abstinence: Strong versus Weak Faith

VNEs also often mentioned persecution of family members who would not eat offered

food[58]. Thảo (C4-3f) told me that her mother's family persecuted her mother, Mrs ___(C4-2f) for, she, after becoming a Christian, was not given any food for a time, to try to force her to eat the offerings when she was visiting her family in central Vietnam. But she continued to refuse, as did her husband, and finally, she said, 'they accepted this, and do not bother them anymore'. However, this family rarely visits their non-Christian relatives due to distance.

Except for the case mentioned, none of my contributors mentioned direct persecution, though most were very careful to avoid actions showing lack of filial piety. However, they gave accounts of others who had experienced this. Leaders mentioned that new believers could be beaten, or temporarily kicked out of their family home, however, in the past, could have been cut off from their families permanently. (C3-7m) Being willing to pay a price for one's faith (*trả giá*) reinforces this new Christian identity and feelings of inclusion in the group, since this demonstrates to the Christian community that the new believer has a genuine faith. QHL Nguyen, writing as a VNE herself, notes: 'This refusal [of the AV rites and practice] is a primary marker of identity for them'. (2013:189) Thus, someone who has paid the price by refusing and perhaps experiencing persecution as VNEs perceive it) demonstrates to the group that this person is 'truly one of us'.

4.4 Voices from the Margins: Those Willing to Eat

Some believers, especially those not closely connected to VNE communities, or in very young communities, had not been, or had rejected the food prohibitions. Several cases are discussed below.

[58] Among these contributors, 'persecution', '*sự bát bớ'*, usually referred to verbal scolding and shaming. Physical abuse seemed rare in terms of trying to physically control or force someone to eat the offerings, although Vietnamese are not averse to physical punishment of children, young people and wives. One other work does mention some physical abuse, cf. (Phan 1996)

4.4.1 Case 1

Mrs Diễm, a widow, has been a VNE for ten years, but continues to insist that her grown children practice the LDG (in opposition to the strict tabus taught her at the HTTL -C3 denomination) for, she stated, 'my children won't remember and respect their father if they don't do this'. (Diễm, C5-7) She did not mention concerns for his salvation, but rather, that her children would continue to express remembrance, through filial obligation, to him. Her niece, VNE contributor Trang **(**C5-1f), never mentioned that Mrs Diễm, was a VNE, to my surprise, for she did not accept her aunt as a genuine Christian. 'She cooks for the LDG for her [deceased] husband's family', she told me, and 'she also eats the offered food', (C5-1f) implying that Mrs Diễm was disingenuous. Her continued participation in the LDG set her outside the boundaries of inclusion of the VNE community. Mrs Diễm was only peripherally connected to the large HTTL (C3) church in her rural community, and with familial and communal ties outside of the church, she did not seem to be distressed at this lack of inclusion.

4.4.2 Case 2

Bác Hai, the oldest woman in the new house church in Cambodia, C6-IHCKC (C9b-3f), became a Christian several years ago but with a non-Christian husband she is forced to prepare and host the LDG for her husband's family. She has no compunction in doing this as a Christian, for 'this is something we should do, we should remember those who have died'. In this informal environment with little or no institutional church policies, there were few negative connotations to participating in the LDG, for there were no boundaries of social inclusion. Most other new believers in this small church seemed to share her convictions. The young leader, (Sambath C6-1f), hesitant for fear of seeming overbearing toward older members, did not stress the prohibition dogmas. Several years after the church began, however, she stated that she felt that Bác Hai, and other young believers

going to LDGs were weak Christians, and she regretted not stressing these teachings from the church's founding. These new believers did not fear social exclusion and continued to practice filial duties when they attended LDG ceremonies.

4.4.3 Case 3

One contributor admitted breaking the food prohibition on condition of anonymity. This VNE (Anon_2015) ate offered food only once, during the time of great hardship after 1975, after the new Socialist government came to power. He felt that not to do so in that situation would have been unkind and dishonouring to a neighbour who offered it, since food was very precious. However, he stressed that he would never give offerings to his parents, or eat any offered food that could be avoided. In that particular case, the most loving action, as a Christian, he felt, was to eat the food whether it had been offered or not. He also thought that to prohibit eating offered food was illogical: 'most of this has been offered [to some being] in the shop itself, before it was purchased'. (Anon_2015) Following this logic, eating offered LDG food was no different than what one purchased in any market or shop.

4.4.4 Case 4

Trang, a Vietnamese-American VNE, had a different view; she believed that to eat the food from the altar had no spiritual overtones, and she felt no guilt in doing so, for, 'food is just food'. (Trang VK-4 2016) She was taught in an independent Baptist church in the United States, and the American pastor told each member, 'just follow your conscience; if you believe that participating in AV rites are a kind of worship, don't do it'. On the LDG of her grandmother, a dearly loved and dedicated Buddhist, her family spend time together on Facebook, remembering their grandmother. However, her grandmother followed a form of meditative Buddhism[59] in which all altars, even ancestral ones, were

[59] This was probably Zen Buddhism, though the contributor could not name it.

removed from her home some years before her death. Her children and grandchildren simply remember, in filial love and duty, her life once a year. In these cases, there were no fears of social exclusion, except for case (Anon_2015), who did not want to be identified.

4.5 Effects of the Prohibition: Evidence of Social Dislocation

Social dislocation was in evidence in many settings. (C2, C3, C4, C6, C7) Smith's study was done among Hong Kong Chinese Evangelicals

> They expect the church to form a new spiritual family … In their exclusive emphasis on individual spirituality they ignore the reality of the family as the individual's primary social nexus…they do not seem to mind when the disenfranchised converts become socially dislocated, disinherited and disrespected because of their unfilial conduct at home. (1987:109)

In some cases, continuous tension was in evidence, for VNEs were always seeking ways to justify their non-compliant behaviour while carefully seeking other means to avoid disunity. (H Phan 1996) Some VNEs have negotiated compromises with family, and over time, the family accepts them, but social dislocation continues to afflict many VNEs and VNE communities as they deal with filial obligation and the sacrality of remembrance.

Mrs Hà attended the Focus Group of December 2016 expressly for the purpose of learning how deal with presence and participation at the LDG of her non-Christian family. 'I was lucky, so lucky 'she told me. I married a Christian, and for years… I didn't have to go'. C8-3f) Taught by her church that it was wrong to go, she continued to feel distressed at her lack of participation. In her case, as with other females, she was excused due to the Confucian ethos of following one's husband's religion. Her continued absence created social dislocation, and she felt separated and isolated. In later years, she had, with her husband, begun going again. However, she, as others, continued to feel uncertain of her 'place' due to her lack of participation in rituals. (Bell 2009:xi) Not all VNEs felt this way. Some single female contributors had 'threaded the needle' through careful negotiation. Southern regions hold more flexible views and they were able to both

conform to the prohibitions but adhere to table fellowship simultaneously, without compromising their convictions. Other families remained in a state of tension. It took considerable effort on the part of all VNEs to find negotiated paths which did not violate the virtues of filiality, mutual obligation and the 'sacrality of remembrance'. Despite changes in outward behaviour (non-participation in AV rites), filial dispositions remain unchanged. Evidence from the data was unequivocal in this regard. No VNE wished to be seen as unfilial toward family or lineage; this left most VNEs in a conflicted state, as was seen in the case of Mrs Hà. (C8-3f)

4.6 Maintaining Filiality and Harmony through Negotiated Behaviour

Being careful to avoid the offence of being lacking in filial piety, (*bất hiếu)*, yet struggling to maintain what is considered a pure Christian lifestyle forces VNEs to live in constant tension, due to close extended family ties. A pastor's wife, told me, 'it's really a problem, we just don't know how to help the young believers'. (C7-2f)

The extended family of Mrs Lạc (C2-1f) holds a number of LDG ceremonies every year in the rural district of Long An; one LDG for each generation in the lineage back to the fourth generation. These feasts are done at various relatives' homes. Lạc's mother also told me that she 'won't force her children to follow any particular religion' and has a very flexible attitude. Most significantly, Mrs Lạc is married to a Christian Australian man. She and her husband always request a separate tray at the LDG in her ancestral village and the family complies unhesitatingly, so there is no familial disunity.

VNEs often found a way to get around participating in the feast by having female members work in the kitchen, thus showing their willingness to participate, but not actually eat the offerings. In the cases of two older females Khanh (C1-1f) and Trang (C5-1f), both without believing male relatives, their main concern was not showing offence to the non-Christian participants. They negotiate diplomatically for fear of

offending and being seen as unfilial. Khanh cooks special dishes and assists as needed. She stressed again and again, 'we must be wise, and not hurt anyone. We should be careful'. (C1-1f) Her personal interpretation of Scripture from passages in the Old Testament taught her that eating offerings from an AV rite was an idolatrous act. She carefully maintains family unity and honouring while threading her way through a complex maze of belief systems. Her family is completely unaware that she abstains from offerings. Her concerns for harmonious relations was as important to her as sharing her Christian convictions.

Mrs Trang (C5-1f), a single mother, has no trouble both attending and keeping the prohibition due to her mother's willingness to negotiate a separate tray for her and her two children. Her extended family knows she is a dedicated Christian, but do not know that her tray of food is unoffered. Her secretive actions, aided by her non-Christian mother, offer no reason for disruption through her quiet avoidance.

New believers of college age in an underground charismatic house church (HTLAS-C7) could not, out of fear of disharmony and disapproval, tell their parents that they had become Christians. Each had been instructed not to eat offered food from the trays at the LDG. (Journal 7, 2015:6) Thus, they each 'trusted God' and God provided ways to each of them to abstain from offered food or being forced to burn incense. The pastor himself, (Pastor___C7-1m, 2f) at one time, lived among non-believers, and explained that he would hide the offered food or leave the room and throw it away. These behaviours of avoidance were taught carefully beforehand to new Christians so that there would be no offense to the family.

Willingness to confront and refuse directly only occurred when social status in terms of hierarchy allowed such behaviour. Evangelist ___ (C4-1m), along with some members of his immediate family and siblings all expressed repugnance to the practice of eating the offerings (*đồ cúng*). (C4-2f, C4-3f, C4-4f, C4-6m, C4-7f) At the LDG for

his father every year, he has found a way through this difficulty by not attending himself, but having his wife help in the kitchen, thus having a token family member present. After his mother (C4-5f) died, his daughter, (Quyen, C4-4f), told me that her family, including her father, would go to her grandmother's LDG on the first death anniversary (being a momentous one) by insisting that the non-Christian siblings prepare a special tray for them so that they did not eat any of the food from the altar. 'She knows that if we don't have a separate tray of food, we won't come'. (C4-4f) Evangelist ___ (C4-1m) is the oldest son; hence, he is able to dictate such terms. In his case, non-Christian members, for the sake of familial unity, acquiesce to these demands. However, this trump card was not often played either: A senior pastor (C4-15m) of the HTGL church (C4) is the oldest son in a family of eight other siblings, all of whom are VNEs, though most of his in-laws are not. He attends the LDG of his father-in-law yearly, but diplomatically either requests a separate tray, or finds a way to excuse himself and his family during the meal. Even for the oldest member of the congregation (HTGL-C4), a high position of respect, non-offensive behaviour was utilized: if invited to an LDG, he would attend the ceremony if he could request separate portions of unoffered food. (Nam C4-11m)

Nearly every VNE contributor asked mentioned these non-offensive tactics, either not being present (often a problem), or an avoidance tactic. VNEs intuitively realize that giving offense through direct confrontation would be non-filial behaviour, and their desire for harmony and unity precludes direct action. They believe God supports them in this and opens ways for them to be set free from a situation in which they are forced to sinful behaviour.

4.6.1 God's Help in Remaining Filial and in Harmony

Several contributors mentioned God's direct intervention in aiding them in avoiding the offered food. This pastor's wife told stories of how a young college student, when at

home, would be called in front of the altar to bow, or be given offerings. 'Something would happen…the person could excuse themselves…God helped them!' Young female leader (C6-1f) felt compelled to attend an LDG at a friend's house. Fearful of being offered the forbidden food, and praying about what to do, her eye began to sting severely. Finally, it became so bad that her hostess said, 'oh, maybe you should go home and take care of that!' She felt that God delivered her from this difficulty.

4.6.2 Indoctrination and Resultant Expressions of Conformity

Much teaching on prohibitions on offered food is transmitted orally, yet very effectively. A young believer, Mrs Lạc, told me that her pastor gave a sermon on food prohibitions and how to behave if one went to the LDG at a relative's house. (C2-1f) She has followed his instruction to the letter, though there is nothing stated in the doctrinal teachings at her church (C2-TLQP) that forbids participation in AV rites. One discipleship booklet, *Giao Lý Căn Bản*, [Basic Doctrines] (HTGL-C4) did contain a very short passage on the forbidding of AV rites, which includes teachings prohibiting the worship of other gods. This was exceptional, and not found in other church manuals. These teachings focus on the first and second commandments and do not mention 1 Corinthians 8-10. Only one sentence in the doctrinal training for new believers forbids eating offerings and active participation in AV rites. In a more positive vein, this lesson[60] also explains that VNEs honour the efforts of their ancestors, and that parents are to be honoured, revered and obeyed during their lifetime. However, there are no instructions for the generations of ancestors who have passed away. The 'sacrality of remembrance 'is virtually ignored in ecclesial teaching in these church locations. (C1, C2, C3, C5, C6, C7) As QHL Nguyen states, 'Evangelical Vietnamese Christians consider filial piety primarily children's moral duty and respect to their parents, which is required in the fifth Commandment'.

[60] Chapter 8 of Basic Doctrines (*Sách Giao Lý Căn Bản*)

(2013:181) When the parent dies, one's obligation is ended.

The few theological works available for pastors do not allude to the AV rites at all; commentary is focused exclusively on the prohibition on idol worship. The only Vietnamese Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians, (Olsen, 1955) does not mention AV rites, though he mentions several spirit-cults in Vietnam, and constantly alludes to 'not eating any food offered to idols'. However, when VNE leaders and some lay members discussed these, they always spoke of AV rituals as associated with idolatry. His instructions were carefully followed even though the commentary never mentioned AV rites. This volume and a more comprehensive one, *Thần Đạo Học*, (Olsen, J. 1958) were the only theological materials (in Vietnamese) used in the HTTL seminary from 1933 onwards until quite recently, and are still most often used in training seminary students in doctrine and orthopraxis. Some changes had occurred, however: Erickson's standard Christian Theology (Erickson 2013) is now being used in the two HTTL seminaries in Vietnam (Pastor___ C3-7m) These theologies do not allude to AV practice at all.

Early doctrinal material seemed to specifically avoid the issue of AV practice. The senior pastor of church (C1-CCOH) explained:

> I think that the first American missionaries and the first VN pastors were very careful people when they wrote down something. They wrote it in a way that didn't made any offense to other people, and I think that's a very good thing for the first growth of the church. They don't want to touch sensitive issues of the culture …in a way that they will violate any tradition or any law and also, they want to pay some respect to the culture of the VN people… they will explain that command by words of mouth. [sic] (C1-14m)

It seems clear that early missionaries saw the virtues of filial piety in a positive light; this is indicated by choices in nomenclature made by the Scripture translation team (Chapter Five). However, they did not understand the central role of filiality within Vietnamese society. Out of cultural respect, however, there is little written documentation on prohibitions regarding AV rites. Some missionaries saw these values as positive. (Reimer, 1975) Faithful to their missionary mentors, then, filiality was seldom promoted in VNE communities, which drew strictly from Western epistemologies of individualist and

holiness theologies. The (HTTL-C3) churches quickly embraced a displacement theology in terms of AV rites (Herendeen, 1975:153-156, Smith 1987:100-108), although at least in later times, some missionaries advocated for the use of functional substitutes. (Reimer,1975)

Individualism in terms of conversion, combined with Holiness theologies, bound to a redemptive, versus creational theologies, allowed for little or no connection with extant traditional culture. This was evident in the fact that VNEs, whose ancestors had died without hearing the gospel message, did not know what to believe or automatically assumed that they were in hell. (C5-1f, C4-10m)

4.6.3 Continued Expressions of Filial Behaviour by VNEs at the LDG

For non-VNEs, presence at the LDG seemed more important than eating offered food, bowing, or lighting incense, in fact, it seemed to be the 'deal breaker'. VNE families that maintained unity by passively attending the rites were generally accepted by extended non-Christian family. Most VNE communities allowed very limited accommodation in non-Christian practices from which they carefully parse and edit those parts considered idolatrous.

VNE leaders now seem to practice this level of accommodation, minimally satisfying filial obligation. There were those, who because of distance, could acceptably excuse themselves, such as VNE leader__ (C8-2m). All VNE leaders and pastors, expressed verbal reluctance to attend (C4-1m, C3-7m, C4-14m), but in many cases, did end up going. This same reluctance was not always in evidence among some average lay VNE members. In fact, some of them told me that it was a warm family reunion which they looked forward to, (Trang, C5-1f) as one young Christian woman (Lạc C2-1f) said, 'it is really fun!' Some leaders would avoid eating at all, if possible (very difficult) and others would request a separate tray that came directly from the kitchen (this required some pre-ceremony negotiation) or at least, as mentioned, send their wife as a

representative to work in the kitchen.

4.7 Analysing the Unresolved Conflict

Differences between descriptions of the practices of the AV rites among non-Christian contributors versus VNE contributors were quite apparent. Among non-Christian contributors there was stress on non-material traits such as remembrance, expressions of filiality, in terms of moral obligation, family unity, and communality. While in general society, both past and present, there are certainly those who believe in the feeding their ancestors (Toán Anh 1969) it is evident that many do not.[61] Reimer discusses the impact of modernization and war on Vietnamese society in a small survey done in Saigon in 1974. At least 50 percent did not believe in spiritual components of the rites, and were unsure that the ancestors returned. This survey was done before Communistic ideologies began to influence the educational system in South Vietnam. (Reimer, 1975:163) Extended family units practised it with varying interpretations and presentations, according to chosen familial traditions (see Chapter Three). In each family, some members believed that the ancestors actually returned, and others did not. However, this issue was not troublesome to them, as every member embraced the underlying disposition of filiality, and its resultant expression of mutual obligation to those who had given one life (the sacrality of remembrance). Improvisations in terms of AV rites allowed for these different expressions, but not for breaches in the ethical dispositions regarding filiality.

VNE contributors verbally underemphasized filiality's expression in AV rites, and, at times, seemed simply to leap over them. When I asked a VNE contributor if he or she attended the LDG, the person would often, initially, seem embarrassed. Their descriptions always stressed the negative aspects; for example, 'if one doesn't attend, one

[61] The writings of Ricci (who worked among the elite and intelligentsia of Chinese society in the 1600s also showed evidence of agnosticism in terms of the ancestors' return during familial rituals. However, De Rhodes, who worked among the common classes in Vietnam comes to the opposite conclusion (Phan 1998:94). See Lowe's work for discussion of social location and its effect on beliefs in terms of in terms of ancestral rites. (Lowe 2001)

will be seen as giving offense', or the negative spiritual aspects of the cult, such as conversing with and worshipping the dead. Thus, they are forced to defensive, rather, under-the-table behaviour, as they intuitively realized non-participation was also an unkind, unloving act, as well as an extremely serious breach of courtesy and required etiquette. The 'must nots' became the highest concern. The food tabu became the central focus, while positive dispositions inculcating familiality, filiality and the sacrality of remembrance were either ignored or diminished for fear of participating in a forbidden connection with evil, or accidentally eating and becoming part of an idolatrous practice. In spite of this, limited accommodation is in evidence: VNEs practice filiality 'in the margins', that is, in peripheral areas, performing non-ritualized actions that may be considered filial during LDG ceremonies. In some situations, withdrawal or avoidance avoided a breach in family unity, but VNE had no means of expressing any appropriate acts of filiality. In other cases, initial tension gave way to mutually 'agreeing to disagree' and an uneasy truce would prevail, with the non-Christian side of the family simply accepting their withdrawal from the cult, or not being aware of their non-participation, but without consensus on ritual and tradition. In this respect, for VNEs, social exclusion is absolutely necessary.

The range of outcomes in terms of verbalized responses in interviews in regard to the prohibitions on eating food offerings was not as narrow as expected, for, as seen above, there were a few VNE contributors who openly admitted to eating the offerings. These contributors adhered to the beliefs of Evangelicalism, yet the VNE community did not fully accept them. The exceptions were significant in terms of social inclusion into VNE communities; where there was no social exclusion, the person continued to participate actively in the LDG. However, no VNE contributors ever said that a person who ate offered food would lose their salvation. It usually meant that one was 'weak '(*yếu đuối*). (Hang C4-10f) Non-participation, was, as QHL Nguyen stated, 'an identity marker

for them' of social inclusion. (2013:170) To eat the offered food is considered sinful, and if done wilfully, may be seen as an open act of idolatry. VNEs (including leaders) did, very slightly, nuance the keeping of the prohibitions, for due to the central trait of filiality, it could not be maintained in accordance with the high bar of VNE dogma. Leaders seemed to intuitively realize, but were unwilling to state, that these boundaries are virtually impossible to enforce within a VNE orthopraxis. For the average VNE, fear enforces this (of sinful behaviour, displeasing God, and the fear of demonic activity), and for a few, fear of contamination. For leaders, fear of loss of reputation and fear of not being able to enforce it in their congregations also demanded continued self-examination and constantly policing the boundaries of inclusion. These behavioural controls reinforced the only means of being free from idolatry, within a world seen as contaminated with evil spirits and powers. (Reimer, 1975:166-7)

Open dissention was rare, but Leader___(C8-2m) expressed his opinion in opposing the VNE tabu to AV rites, and felt able, at least to me, to express disagreement with the 'party line', though feeling powerless to do anything about it:

> First, they [Vietnamese society] seldom worship the ancestors; the meaning is so small, when they do [perform the ritual of food and incense] who thinks the ancestors are really there? They are only expressing filial piety, honouring [*hiếu kính cha mẹ*] they remember their own lineage, to show others that they are filial people who remember their own family line.

None of the VNE contributors in any way disparaged or neglected filial attitudes expressed in the LDG, though a portion felt that these either were either not truly filial (having to do with their own family's expressions of drinking and partying) were hypocritical (done to 'show off' one's status), were superstitious, and particularly among contributors born into VNE families, 'eating with dead people'. (C2-1f), (C4-9m)

The dispositions of a filial *habitus* in Vietnamese society are so strong that VNE leadership has, as can be seen, gradually minimized the prohibitions. In past decades, as noted, the (HTTL-C3) mother denomination taught that a VNE could not be present at an LDG, or at any other AV rite (including funerals). As other underground churches and

denominations were founded, and more influence came in from the outside, these regulations have begun to soften. All of the VNEs contributors, except one pastor, (C3-7m 2015) were willing, at least to be present, thus showing movement toward a limited form of accommodation. Other actions, such as eating from a separate tray also showed carefully negotiated attempts to accommodate the family, and absolute refusal to attend was seemingly only practised by males with high familial status (such as Evangelist C4-1m, or senior pastor C4-15m) Females and young people, (both male and female), practised avoidance or diplomacy, but were unable to bring anything positive or redemptive to the rites in terms of Christian witness. Females who married Christian husbands (contributors C2-1f, C4-2f, and C8-3f) were excused, for the Confucian ethic of 'following one's husband 'supersedes the necessity of participation, and this Confucian ethos freed them from this requirement.

4.8 Conclusion

One feels the greatest sympathy for the conflict in which VNEs seemed trapped, though there has been little effort to nuance their position by emphasizing the filial aspects of one's duty, and fulfilling moral obligations to those who given them life; that is, the sacrality of remembrance. The current orthopraxis regarding these prohibitions has done very little, even alongside inculturation keys, to offset the fears and tensions associated with AV rites. The ethos attributed to these dogmas, unfortunately, create fear (of sin and demonic activity), are non-relational in nature, and enforce isolation from other family members. God's plan, seen in his very nature, and through the *imago dei* in humankind, cries out for love and unity.

VNEs practice filiality in mundane activities of life, (Chapter Five) not only as a means of conciliatory behaviour, but in truly caring for living parents conscientiously. They often go to great lengths to maintain familial unity. While it is very apparent that VNEs love their non-Christian family members, their fear of participating in idolatrous

actions becomes a negative influence, leaving them constantly on the defensive. Orally transmitted teachings, through Sunday school teachers, mentors and pastors, lead to the formation of prohibitions from an Old Testament perspective, at the expense of adhering to the central sacral practices of Vietnamese society, in particular family unity and inclusion. The enforcement of this prohibition functions negatively in terms of familial unity, showing respect, and 'finding one's place' (Bell, 2009: xi) for it produces social dislocation.

Smith's quantitative study done in Hong Kong also showed similar responses (Smith 1987), due to the displacement model as the approach to AV practice, with Christian respondents expressing fear of demonic activity if one participates in AV rites:

> Fundamentalists always assume the predominance of fear as the motivation for ancestor worship. By accenting the fear of being cursed by a departed spirit, they exonerate themselves for brusquely dismissing the traditional motive of filial piety. Instead of a virtue Chinese filial piety takes on a sinister connotation. Since it involves duties to the dead, it falls under the unscriptural categories of necromancy and contact with spirits. (107)

Filial piety is virtually ignored by VNEs in terms of AV practice, or submerged under the fear of evil and idolatry. Similar rejectionist stances are common in other Asian contexts (Ro, ed 1985; Tan 1983; Beyerhaus 1966), passed down from missionary mentors. One missionary contributor stated: 'So our pastors and everything, would always explain the stupidness of worshipping the ancestors and present[ing] the food… They speak straight to them … and I did this all the time'. (Irwin MC3) Little sympathy is seen in this perspective, for filiality was not well understood.

Committed to a scientific rational worldview, (undergirded by dematerialization in some respects), and using, at times, very literal interpretations (or mis-interpretation) of various verses in the Old Testament and from 1 Corinthians 10-11 passed on to new converts the fear of being affected by evil spirits. This is seen in the results of the data. To be fair, there were many instances of demonic possession during the decades of the missionaries' service and cases of this are recorded throughout missionary documents, both missionaries and Vietnamese Christians had significant experiences in this arena.

(Smith 1934) However, fear cannot lead to a solution to the conflict in ancestral practices; patrolling the boundaries of orthodoxy done through a tabu can never be the solution to the problem.

There is no precedence for this in Scripture, for the New Testament teaches us that Christians have authority over evil spirits. In 1 Corinthians 10:13 (among other verses) one is taught to flee the temptation to sin, but never to flee from evil spirits. This reactionism has nothing to tie to in the New Testament. The temptation, then, that a Vietnamese person might feel, then, is usually the distress over being seen as unfilial, the need to express the sacrality of remembrance, the need to be socially compliant, and/or the need to remain in harmony with one's family. The creation of these fears was clearly seen among VNE contributors, for example, Miss Dũng. (C4-12f) Contributors addressed the fears of demonic presence in several instances, all of which occurred in the context of Buddhist practice, not AV rites (which necessarily need to be distinguished from one another). The displacement model used in China, Hong Kong, and Korea also contain these elements, by literal (or, over-literal) interpretation of Scripture. (Tan 1983; Kim 1988) A displacement model does little or nothing to allow for even functional substitutes to form or other improvisational approaches which draw directly from the embedded set of dispositions and practices of one's own culture. Added to this is the resulting social dislocation, as expressed by some contributors. The main reason for avoidance tactics of VNEs, is that no one (much less the church) wants a person to be disenfranchised or disinherited by their family (they are filial pietiets as well!) Instinctively VNEs know that to break off the ritual is seen as an immoral act, and deeply wish to avoid open confrontation in doing so. VNEs, in the main, continue to follow a displacement (rejectionist) model, and do not allow for substitution. There were no functional substitutes, such as a Christian altar, and rarely, even a picture of a deceased relative in the house. However, as seen, a displacement model is in reality, unworkable in real life.

Over time, small adjustments had been made. Avoidance, and ‘fleeing temptation’ to avoid eating offerings) to prevent offense was the key tactic, not confrontation, which can only occur if the person, as was Evangelist__(C4, 1m), the oldest son and the head of the clan. Even then, he did not have the power to command that the entire lineage follow him in abandoning AV rites. The power of the group then, is seen, in the current generation, has come to be, in some instances, as powerful as the grid. (Douglas 1970) Chapter Five examines limited attempts by VNEs to break out of this model through inculturation, and small improvisations, and whether this has the potential to lead to the formation of local theology.

Chapter Five

Limited Creative Agency in VNE Inculturation Keys

5.1 Background

Linguistic inculturation keys utilized by missionaries in the translation of the Vietnamese Protestant Bible provided the basis for underlying hermeneutic of VNE belief on filial piety which translates into care of living parents and in mundane activities of life. A hermeneutic developed in consensus with Evangelical dogma which was originally taught by missionaries. (Simpson 1888; Van De Walle 2009; Truong 2012) Description and analysis of these implementations will be examined in terms of agency and whether experimental improvisations beyond inculturation keys implemented by missionaries indicate a shift in VNE orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

5.2 Inculturation through Nomenclature: '*Hiếu Kính Cha Mẹ*'

The C & MA mission team, headed by Grace Cadman, along with significant input by missionary John Olson, and a small team of Vietnamese language assistants, Phạm Khôi and Trần Vạn Đồng, neither of whom were Christians (Sawin 1982:1), gradually translated the Scriptures into Vietnamese over a period of years, completing it in 1926. Phạm Khôi was a Confucian scholar. It is apparent that though the missionaries relied heavily upon these assistants, the missionaries themselves made all decisions regarding nomenclature. (Cadman 1925) Olsen and missionary Hosler were also fluent in Chinese, and their familiarity with the newly translated Chinese Bible may have influenced their understanding of filiality and its significance in Vietnamese life and culture. A number of Bible translations were used[62] and these missionaries, along with their Vietnamese team members, crafted a linguistic term *hiếu kính cha mẹ,* (be filial toward your parents)

[62] '[Olsen] used as a basis for his work the French Synodal Version and the Roman Catholic diglot version (French and Vietnamese.) The Cadmans used the Catholic Version and the Louis Segond French Version. In their final revision they sought to conform the Vietnamese translation to the American Standard Version' (Sawin 1982:2)

in place of the term the term ‘honour’ in the fifth Commandment. This ultimately produced a form of inculturation, which was the basis for an implicit doctrine supporting the continued understanding and practice of filiality by all VNEs.

While documentation of the translation process in limited, it appears that the missionaries saw the necessity of finding an equivalent term for filiality and incorporating it into Scripture. The translation team used dynamic equivalence[63] in the translation process. This laid the groundwork for VNEs allowance and continuance of revised practices of filiality in daily life and church life, for a VNE needs only to go directly to Scripture itself to see that the central belief system surrounding filial piety was explicitly explained, as well as commanded by God. This overtly added a sacramental quality to the phrase, *hiếu kính cha mẹ* as used in the fifth commandment[64]; such language indicates to a Vietnamese reader that God commands filial behaviour towards one’s parents, [65] stated in a uniquely Vietnamese way. This was not just the common expression of filial piety, *hiếu thảo*, but a term invested with an elevated sacrality. This inculturation allowing VNEs to understand and fulfil filial duty toward God by fulfilling filial duties to one’s parents was incorporated into VNE orthopraxy from that time on. VNEs, when reading the fifth commandment, knew immediately that filial behaviour is required by the Christian God. This allowed a Vietnamese Christian to continue mundane duties inscribed by a filial *habitus.*

The unique verbal phrase, *hiếu kính* (filial + honour), was used a total of six times throughout the Old and New Testament. (Ex 20:12, Deut. 5:16, Matt. 15:4, Matt. 15:5, Mark 10:19 and Luke 18:20) Each time the English word honour, was used, the compound verb, *hiếu kính,* which includes the word for filiality *hiếu* and the term for high

[63] Hesselgrave explains this per Kraft’s definition, as: ‘Dynamic equivalence, he says, goes far beyond the formal word-by-word equivalence model where "the focus of understanding is on the surface-level linguistic forms through which the message is conveyed."‘ (Kraft, 264) (Hesselgrave & Rommen 1989:62)
[64] The fifth commandment in the Protestant Bible, as used by VNEs; this is the fourth commandment in the Catholic version.
[65]The Catholic Bible does not translate the term as *hiếu kính,* but rather the term, *trọng kính.*

respect, or honour, *kính*. An exact translation of the fifth Commandment from Vietnamese is difficult, but it would be approximately to show filial honour/ high respect toward your parents .The addition of the term *kính* elevates filiality toward parents as a sacred duty commanded by God. In fact, the word *hiếu kính* has a higher connotation of sacredness than the English term, honour.

Identical vocabulary was also used in the newest version of the Vietnamese Bible, (Bản Dịch Mới), done by a team of formally trained Vietnamese scholars, published in 2001 and contains the equivalent use of *hiếu kính*. (Kinh Thánh 2002) The current generation of VNE leaders were in consensus that this inculturation key was a valid one. The improvised nomenclature produced a form of inculturation that clearly implies duty toward God, as opposed to one's deceased ancestors. This has been incorporated into a VNE epistemology, mundane activities, and recently, into ecclesial community events. However, it has serious limitations in terms of a general epistemology; outside VNE circles, this terminology would be unknown.

5.2.1 The Interpretation of *Hiếu Kính Cha Mẹ* by VNEs

Seven different Evangelical churches in this project were followed and the leaders of all seven congregations used this term. Several later Vietnamese translations of Scripture[66] use the term *hiếu kính* in the fifth commandment. VNE Pastor Nguyen Hong Chi explained this term to me:

> The concept of *hiếu* in this kind of culture not only means "honouring your parents" but also means "taking good care of your parents, following their path(s)", etc. … Therefore, they felt the need to combine "hiếu" and "kính" together in order to "marry" the bible to the culture. [sic] (C1-14m, personal email, 06-14-17)

My personal observation over many years is that VNEs understand *hiếu kính* toward parents and grandparents in a very similar, but perhaps, even more devoted and dutiful

[66] Until the late 1990's the only version of the Vietnamese bible was the original Kinh Thánh Bản Truyền Thống but currently there are four accepted Protestant translations, and certainly more underway.

way than that seen in general society.[67] Quyên (C4-4f), for example, stated that she felt that her aunts did not express much sorrow when her grandmother died, as several of them had been trying to get her to pay for the fortune-tellers (*thầy bói)* to perform ceremonies which would aid in finding a winning lottery number and this had caused her much trouble, even weakening her health; she expressed great sorrow over what she saw as the lack of concern from non-Christian relatives. 'They just saw it as something normal' she said. (Quyên, C4-4f)

5.2.2 The Filial Expressions of *Hiếu Thảo* Performed as *Hiếu Kính Cha Mẹ* in Mundane Activity

Practises of filial behaviour in mundane activity, but expressed as *hiếu kính cha mẹ,* were found in primary data. In fact, VNE behaviour in this regard was indistinguishable from typical filial practices (*hiếu thảo*). The main differentiation is that of the 'sacrality of remembrance'; that is, VNEs removed sacred elements in remembering ancestor by de-ritualizing memorial, thus de-sacralizing it as well. *Hiếu kính cha mẹ* is focused totally on the living, and one's moral conduct after the death of parents is the only means of honouring their memory. Even the minority of VNEs who gather once a year to remember the deceased perform no rituals. Female pastor (C2-6f) noted that her entire VNE family would come together for a meal, and would cook food that her deceased father had liked at their gathering, common custom at the LDG in general society. Except for a prayer over the food, no rituals or ceremonies are performed. Among contributors, a significant number of VNE families seemed to keep a remembrance tradition of some kind, but these were invariably shorn of any ritual activity. A member of (HTTL-C3) denomination both told me that her family had a remembrance meal for her mother, but under-emphasized

[67] In my experience with many VNEs, I have never seen anything but respect and care for elderly family members.

it: ‘oh it’s just a dinner where we get together and talk about my mom. There is no ceremony [*lễ*] ’, implying that it was not something terribly important for her. (Journal 8, 2015:15) Many VNEs do nothing at all, for this has not been encouraged by most leaders. Mr Nam (C4-10m, 2016) shared that he had prepared one LKN long ago for his children who were not yet Christians at the time. But once was enough, he told me, as all of them were Christians now, thus it was no longer necessary. In these cases, all sacrality of remembrance is essentially erased.

5.2.3 *Hiếu Kính Cha Mẹ* and Repentance

Mrs Phươug, a church worker (CVK-2f, 2015) told me the story of a young man who was thrown out of the house by his father when he became a Christian and would not participate in AV rites. Living independently, he broke off relations with his father and refused to meet him for some years. However, she said, he eventually, repented because ‘he listened to the Word of God and he realized he was wrong ’and took the initiative and he and his father were reconciled. Mrs Phương (CVK-2f) placed the blame upon the son for his non-filial behaviour, versus the father who forced the son to leave, for the son was lacking in his filial duties. The filial disposition was evident here, and the son’s repentance indicated that he had been deficient in his moral duties, however, it was God’s Word which brought him to his senses. Implicit enculturation is evident: filial behaviour and Christian behaviour are virtually identical in nature and practice. Her description of the son’s behaviour mirrored expected moral behaviour in larger Vietnamese society, the only difference being the son’s recognition of his duty through the Word of God, (versus parental and societal teaching). This correlation with the VNE improvisation of *hiếu kính cha mẹ* and the duty of filiality (*hiếu thảo*), shows the continuance of filial traits through enculturation, the difference being that the filial trait and resulting duties are commanded by God Himself. VNEs implicitly then, recognize filiality as a desired Christian virtue,

though it is extant in Vietnamese culture and this is not a theological 'fit 'with a replacement theology.

5.2.4 Hiếu Kính Cha Mẹ and Punishment by God (*Đức Chúa Trời)*, or by Heaven (*Ông Trời*)

VNE Evangelist___(C4-1m) recounted a story of a family who professed to be Christians, but whose children were unfilial (*bất hiếu)*. The family had been attending church, were baptized and participated in the LTT. In fact, they were hypocritical, he explained, their desire in coming to church was for material gain. At the same time, their adult children had begun consorting with underworld criminal gangs. One day he saw several of these adult children being arrested. This was the consequence of the parent's sins, he believed, that they were being punished for their hypocrisy by being cursed with unfilial children. This was the consequence, Evangelist___(C4-1-2m) believed, of the parents' refusal to obey God; the children had brought shame upon the entire family. His interpretation mirrored traditional thinking of filiality being the highest good, pointing toward the Supreme Dao. (Liu, 2003:234)

The reverse of this is also true: those who are unfilial are punished by God. This is synonymous with traditional beliefs of fear of being punished if one is unfilial for these traditions state that the unfilial will be punished by Heaven, or, Ông Trơi. VNE contributors saw unfilial behaviour being punished by a personal God (Đức Chúa Trời*)* just as a non-VNE saw punishment as coming from heaven. Chih discusses the filial value in Chinese society:

> Filial piety is the concrete norm of good and evil, right and wrong. It becomes naturally, to the millions of illiterate peasants, as the only understandable and practical way to be a good person. By the same token, the lack of filial piety becomes a crime. (Chih 1981:350)

Since the performance of, or participation in, AV rites as an expression of moral virtue, to do otherwise would indeed be considered a crime, (or, at least in modern society, be considered morally deficient) and which no member of society, including VNEs, desire.

Evangelist__(C4-1m) effortlessly made a 'leap', or an innovation (Herskovits 1949:641) toward transmutative enculturation as his ethical filial disposition was a contiguous bridge into a VNE belief system inclusive of filiality, at least as it regarded living parents. In this case, the inculturation key *hiếu kính cha mẹ* enabled him to make this symbolic leap as he drew from extant virtues of an inscribed filial *habitus*.

VNEs are not timid about talking about retribution occurring if one disobeys God. Mrs Khanh (C1-1f) stated 'God is a jealous God'. She believed that the Scripture taught that one is prohibited from practicing AV rites. The fear of God's punishment is real to VNEs. This was seen both in primary data and in my own experiences with them. This is also reminiscent of 'locative religion', (Padgett, 2007) for the boundaries of behaviour and spiritual actions must be carefully monitored. This is done through proper Christian behaviour, including filiality as seen as *hiếu kính cha mẹ.* This also echoes the previous quote by Lim in regard to Chinese culture:

> With regard to divine-human relationships, they relate to their Christian God with ideas of retribution and reciprocity, which are essential elements in Chinese popular religion. All these are not a simple mixing of elements of Protestantism and Chinese religion, nor are these a simple acceptance of one religious tradition and rejection of another. (Yip 1985)' (2015:113)

As can be seen, these traits are recognized and appropriated, indication of *habitus,* as Lim notes, 'nor are these a simple acceptance of one tradition and rejection of another'. These traits of reciprocity and retribution may be appropriated into one's new spiritual practices and worldview. The Vietnamese, as seen above, have appropriated this same retribution from Ông Trơi for unfilial behaviour and allot these traits to the God of Christianity (Đức Chúa Trời).

5.2.5 VNE Church Events Improvisations Expressing Filiality as *Hiếu Kinh Cha Mẹ*

Two VNE churches in this project (C3, C4) perform a ceremony in the church setting to show an expression of filiality to living parents. Independent Methodist churches (HTGL-C4) have a special day to show filiality toward parents. This service, called the Lễ Song

Thân, done in conjunction with the Western holiday of Mother's Day, was a celebration of parents, stressing one's duty toward one's parents as the highest expression of human love, versus the Western concept of romantic love. (Journal 4, 2015:28-37)

The senior pastor (C4-15m, 2015) preached a special sermon, carefully pointing out how it is impossible for us, as Christians, to love one another until we learn to love our parents, for this is how we learn to love others. He was seemingly unaware (and sensed no incompatibility) in drawing directly from Mencian/Confucian thought on filiality, bridging indigenous epistemology and re-interpreting this thought effortlessly into Christian teaching. Statements such as these are evidence of Christian enculturation, using a Mencian statement (Liu, 2003:236, 245) as a definition of Christian love. However, he never mentioned parents or grandparents who had passed away. There was a striking absence in regard to the mention of those who had died; the sacrality of remembrance was generally ignored. His sermon featured the history of the Jewish people as those acknowledging the honouring of their ancestors, which is why, he said, the Jewish race continues to be blessed by God, attempting a blending of Western theology with the Vietnamese filial value. His attempt to exalt Jewish culture was an attempt at inculturation, for again, the Christian message came to the Vietnamese from the outside world, focusing on 'what the Vietnamese are not' versus drawing from extant truth within his own culture, and had in fact, just done so by quoting Mencian/Confucian thought. The case could have been made that Vietnamese have been expressing filiality for centuries in honouring parents and grandparents, and were implicitly following the fifth commandment. Fear of associating Vietnamese cultural traits with the Christian message continue to dictate acculturation, versus enculturation approaches. Filial expressions, done throughout the service through songs, poetry, and choral singing brought forth an avalanche of emotion for parents and grandparents and nearly everyone was in tears at some point during the service. The pastor said afterwards, 'I was so moved I could hardly

even preach'. Journal 4, 2015:35) All filial expressions were prosaic in nature, that is, suited to the 'arts of the ear'. No pictures were used and no references were made to ancestors who had never heard the gospel message. This service functions in some sense as a ceremonial substitute for ancestral rites, though only for those still living, versus deceased Christian and non-Christian ancestors.

Similarly, (HTTL-C3) denomination, credited with founding Evangelicalism in Vietnam, has instituted, in some churches, a special service (also done on the Western celebration of Mother's Day) called Ngày Hiếu Kính Cha Mẹ [Honouring Our Parents], in which, again, there are many expressions of filiality. A sermon taken from Scriptures on 1 Samuel, or on Jesus as the filial son, may be preached. Evangelism is often emphasised, and non-believers, especially parents and grandparents, are invited to accept Christ. Often a fellowship meal is provided at the end of the service. However, this event is not universally practised in HTTL churches. HTTL contributor stated, 'it is not done very widely'. (C8- 2m) This practice seems to be recent addition in urban churches; it was not in evidence in the years that I lived in Vietnam.

5.3 Attempts to Recreate Filiality in Conflicted Settings

One of the goals of the Confucian system is to maintain familial harmony through the patriarchal, hierarchical system of kinship connections with the living and to some degree, with those beyond the grave, through the continued expression of performance of filial obligations as *ơn* and *biết ơn*. This familial harmony, achieved through the Confucian system: 'was … intended to bring unity and harmony into the large family system', (Kim 1988), for 'filial piety … is at once a family practice, an ideology and a system of regulating power relations'. (Hashimoto 2004:182) Since AV rites are a moral expression of the disposition of filiality, the refusal to perform them must promote disharmony. Chapter Four gave examples of VNEs, particularly young people and women who, often with difficulty, negotiated through the rites without compromising

their faith. The inculturation key, *hiếu kinh cha mẹ,* does not aid in dealing with the sacrality of remembrance for deceased relatives, as well as for those who have never heard the Christian gospel. VNEs do not have much 'wiggle room' in terms of dealing with issues of ritual and with the sacrality of remembrance; these gaps allow conflict and disharmony to arise within families. Ritual actions of any kind outside Christian ecclesial forms to various other spiritual beings indicate an act of idolatry. This puts enormous pressure on the VNE family to try to attain, or reconstruct the harmony and needed unity within a VNE paradigm.

Disagreement in regard to the LDG has gone on since the immediate family of Evangelist___C4-1m became Christians in 1993. His position as an evangelist in the (C4-HTGL) church created extra pressure on him to make sure that standards are properly kept both in the eyes of the community and the church. He explained that he held a different viewpoint than many Vietnamese; he did not really worship his dead ancestors before he became a Christian. When his father died in a motorbike accident many years earlier because of drunk driving, he angrily told his mother to 'take down the altar', for he did not want to venerate his father, whom he saw as acting irresponsibly toward his family. 'I have permission to do that,' he stated, referring to his status as the eldest son. (C4-1m) Knowing my position as a missionary, he was probably eager to show his family as a model VNE family; separated from all unacceptable indigenous practice as possible. (Journal 4, Reflexivity notes, p.1) His immediate VNE family members firmly believe they must hold their ground in resisting anything in regard to the practice of AV rites by continuing to refuse full participation in LDG rituals year after year, in hopes that their non-believing family will eventually 'see the light' and also abandon these rituals. They believe this provides a witness to the true God and the inefficacy of the rites.

The two adult daughters, Thảo (C4-3f), and Quyên (C4-4f), of Evangelist (C4-1m) had been taught, after their father's conversion, to believe that eating offerings was wrong.

Thảo (C4-3f) recounted a story from her childhood: ‘my grandmother tried to trick me one time, giving me offered food, but I knew what it was, and refused, telling her, “Grandmother, God will punish you if you make me eat that.”’ She and her sister were not afraid to express their convictions, due to their father’s status. The belief is reminiscent of punishment from Ông Trời due to unfilial behaviour, yet is reversed: instead of eating with the deceased as an expression of filial piety, to eat would be an idolatrous act committed against God.

I observed this family altar on the top floor of the oldest sister’s house of the extended family of Evangelist___(C4,1m). It was not excessively decorated, as are many altars, which are usually crowded with worship paraphernalia, often including other spiritual deities besides ancestors. There were no pictures and the ancestral tablets are hidden although it held an urn for incense and candleholders. On the shelf above is a small statue of Quan Âm, the female Buddha, who has nothing to do with AV rites, but is commonly seen near or above the AV altar.

Illustration 5.1 Ancestral Altar Source: Wise, 03-14

This family altar was in located in the home of the oldest sister of the family of Evangelist__(C4-1m), who would never have such an altar in his own home. Her home, however, was not the original ancestral home and land, but one recently acquired. The brother-in-law of Evangelist ___(C4-1m), Mr Trung (C4-6m), stressed that he did not adhere to any religion, but was tolerant of all of them. He stated that the altar in the house (where the AV rites are held) was not a real altar, since they were not in the ancestral home, and since Evangelist__C4-1m will not perform them. However, he continues to burn incense and give fruit and flowers on the death day anniversary [LDG] of his father-in-law, 'that day we place [food] on the altar, light incense in order to invite his soul back, to remember, that is all'. His nuanced response, 'it is just to remember, that is all' was slightly defensive. He minimalized the metaphysical aspects, assuming I held a negative position on the rites. However, he and Quyên, the daughter of Evangelist___ (C4-1m) explained the changes in the rites: 'at the LDG, everyone offers individually 'for there is

now no collective ceremony, for the eldest son is not willing to perform the ceremony and he would be the one with proper status to perform it.

In the process of interviewing the Evangelist's mother, (Grandmother, C4-5f) the 80-year-old family matriarch, she was interrupted several times by her VNE daughter-in-law (C4-2f) to correct her answers. Asking Grandmother: 'Do you worship the ancestors?' her daughter-in-law immediately spoke over her and said, 'No, we don't. We just have a *lễ kỳ niệm* [LKN] once a year to remember my father-in-law'. C4-2f, 2015) Grandmother was not allowed to answer. Asked if he returned on the day of the LDG, she was uncertain. When asked, 'where do you think your [deceased] husband is now?' She responded, 'I don't know, maybe he is in heaven, or somewhere, I don't know, we can't see him'. (C4-5f) She used the VNE term, *thiên đàng*, rather than Buddhist terminology, *miên tây cực lạc*; distinct VNE influence is seen here.[68] Her daughter-in-law immediately interjected, 'but we do know, he is in heaven, don't you know, Grandmother? He didn't hear about God during his life, but he was a good person, so we know he is there'. (C4-2f) She attempted to control the narrative and to bring Grandmother's responses into the acceptable boundaries of Christian practice. When family members left the room briefly, I asked Grandmother about her beliefs, and she discussed going to the temple occasionally, saying that attending made her feel peaceful. When I asked her, 'do you feel sad that Evangelist ___(C4-1m) and his family don't want to follow you in doing the LDG?' She laughed and said, 'Oh no, they are adults, they can decide for themselves'. Her flexible attitude was surprising, since the traditional LDG ceremony is not performed, but she seemed to see non-traditional rites as adequate. As a female, she may have also felt that she was not totally responsible for the performance of

[68] Pure Land Buddhism teaches that one may reach a heavenly existence through the bodhisattvas, of whom Quan Âm is the most significant figure.

rites, which are traditionally dependent on the male hierarchy, and was willing to acquiesce. She obviously continued to adhere quietly to her own convictions, despite changes in LDG rites. She did not seem afraid of these changes nor fear the lack of performance bringing unluckiness or disaster to the family. Since his abdication from the ritual performance had occurred many years before, perhaps she was reconciled to it or felt comfortable with her son's beliefs. While she and Mr Trung (C4-6m) both believed that the ancestors had some influence in the world of the living, they were not fearful of harm, but rather felt the need for filial expression through the rites. She also alluded to the soul of the one who owned the house she lived in (she lived in a home recently purchased by her daughter), and that giving an offering to these deceased was a way to 'assure blessing and health,' but did not seem fearful if this did not occur, or only occurred rarely.

Interviews a year later (Quyên C4-4f) revealed that Grandmother had passed away. The eldest daughter of Grandmother held a Buddhist funeral at her home, even while a minority of VNE relatives of Evangelist ___(C4-1m) (C4-7m, C4-8f) requested a Christian funeral. In this case, Evangelist__ (C4-1m) had to bow to the inevitable. In a small concession, the Buddhist monks stopped beating the drum when the VNE church members came for the visitation. In spite of the ambiguity of Grandmother's religious affiliations, and the natural assumption that there would be a Buddhist funeral, several VNE family members believed that Grandmother had become a genuine Christian before her death. Evangelist (C4-1m) explained his conviction:

> A lady pastor came [to visit my mother] Her name was the same as my mother's name, Võ Như Loan. Her family name is Võ and my mother's name is Võ Thị Điệu. She came and witnessed to my mother and my mother believed in God. My mother passed away already, but she believed in God before she died.

In my own brief interaction with her, she did not seem to show any Christian convictions, clearly stating her preference for going to the temple, and stressing the importance of the LDG for her deceased husband in spite of her eldest son's opposition. During the next

year, Evangelist__ (C4-1m) stressed that she had been to church, 'people saw her there' possibly trying to convince me that she was a genuine Christian. Questioning Thảo (C4-3f), informally, over dinner, I asked if she believed Grandmother was with God (Journal 4, 2015:22), and she replied immediately that she had no doubt that her grandmother was with the Lord. She did not state why she believed this, but seemed very sure. Her younger sister, Quyên (C4-4f) was also asked if she felt that her Grandmother had become a Christian and she said rather hesitantly, 'I heard that, but I wasn't there at that time, I was at school,' indicating uncertainty and some doubt. The family of Evangelist__(C4-1m) pushed aside doubts, ignored any possible double allegiance, and believed sincerely that Grandmother was truly a Christian. In this way they could be at peace regarding her place in eternity and maintain status, or cultural capital, as Christian leaders. The boundaries of social inclusion were maintained and a Christian narrative regarding the family matriarch was kept in place. Any other outcome was seen as unacceptable. In this way VNEs intend to give a Christian witness to their family around them, for whatever witness is shown must express an opposition to idolatry, and must be maintained at all costs. To admit to Grandmother's temple attendance and participation in AV rites might tag her as one participating in idolatry and to admit to any other narrative might bring shame and loss of face to the family, and to the status of Evangelist___. (C4-1m)

Conflict in split families' places both sides in serious difficulty and familial harmony may be in jeopardy. While Grandmother may certainly have become a genuine Christian before her death, Evangelist (C4-1m) and his family felt compelled to build a narrative fencing out doubts, due to Grandmother's very un-Christian like practices over her lifetime, and to re-create a sanitized narrative for the Christian community and outsiders such as myself, in line a proper modernity, as 'liberation from a host of false beliefs and fetishisms that undermine freedom'. (Keane 2007:5) The inculturated keys established by missionaries of *hiếu kính cha mẹ*, the prohibition on the rites, and need to

enforce the boundaries of social inclusion did not aid this family in their presentation of the gospel message to their non-Christian members. No other improvisations were seen here, due to prohibition, fear and enforced tabus.

5.4 Lễ Kỳ Niệm (LKN): Remembrance in the Family Home

The senior pastor of (HTTL-C3 church) explained that ceremonies to honour parents may be done in a home, as an LKN:

> An LKN is a gathering…the pastor comes to talk about God. On that day the children express their heart of filiality toward their parents. Then children and adults who still have living parents give roses to them; those still have living parents are given red roses, those who do not are given white roses. Children then express thanks to their parents, promising them to follow and live for God. (C3-7m)

When I asked him if there was a communal meal done after this, he said, 'No we haven't done that yet'. There was a dearth of activities, practices, that could have been used in developing a traditional ritual similar to an LDG. Fear again plays a role: no communal meal is shared; the fears of its similarity to an LDG dictates this behaviour. However, practices toward the LKN are not regulated among (HTTL- C3) congregations, for two member contributors told me that they have an LKN meal at home once a year for a deceased parent, always held on the date of the parent's death. This simple presentation has slight ritualistic overtones, and, at least, does acknowledge deceased Christian ancestors, and even more importantly, is locative: it is held in the family's home on the anniversary of the person's death.

These improvisations, however, have little likelihood of moving toward a more innovative approach, for several reasons stated: first, the term *hiếu kính cha mẹ* is not used in the wider culture, being exclusive to VNE communities. Secondly, 'looking to the source' or the sacrality of remembrance was nearly ignored, (especially if the ancestors were not Christians) and this missing expression would be apparent to the average Vietnamese.

5.5 Experimental Improvisation on the Sacrality of Remembrance

In a small, recently planted, house church in a village among the Kampuchea Krom ethnic minority in Kratie, Cambodia, a young female church leader (Sambath, C6-1f) decided with her father, Mr Đen, (C6-2m) to carry out a Christian *Lễ Kỳ Niệm* (LKN) ceremony for his deceased parents; her grandparents. The Kampuchea Krom ethnic minority is highly assimilated in Vietnam, mainly following Theravada Buddhism. Those contributors in this project all displayed ancestral altars in their homes, usually alongside Quan Âm, Buddha, or other Bodhisattvas. Filiality, it was seen is a deeply inculcated disposition.

Mr Đen, as the patriarchal head of the extended family unit, some of whom were committed Evangelicals, had migrated to rural Cambodia from Sóc Trang Province in the Mekong Delta. They had become Evangelicals in Sóc Trang, and were accepted into membership in a HTTL church about 20 kilometres away, led by ethnic Vietnamese (Kinh) leadership. Highly regulated by local governmental policies, which dictated that only the Vietnamese language was allowed in church and home settings was troubling to them, as well as their highly circumscribed status as an ethnic minority group. Granted permission to obtain citizenship in Cambodia, the immediate family of Mr. Đen moved across the border. While still in Vietnam, after their decision to become Evangelicals, they were targeted by local authorities and their house church was visited and shut down for periods of time. Living in a more open environment without many overt governmental controls and no institutional church oversight led to a desire and an openness to experiment, that is, toward improvisation. At my encouragement, they designed a simple LKN for non-believing deceased parents, who had never heard the gospel message. Under my oversight as foreign missionary leader and no longer part of an institutional setting, they seemed eager to hold such a ceremony after Sambath and I discussed the hindrances in overcoming barriers regarding AV rites. It was apparent that if it had been allowed by

church authorities in Vietnam, they would have held such a ceremony, and it was performed during my absence. Mr Đen (C6-2m), the eldest male in the extended family, structured the LKN ceremony using the HTTL (C3) training manual. (Hôi Thánh Tin Lành Vietnam MN 2011:72) It was performed in this way: Candles were used, and two large, hand-drawn pictures of the deceased grandparents were hung up in the room. Various Scriptures passages such as John 14:2-3 ('in my house there are many mansions'), Luke 16:19-31 (the story of the beggar Lazarus) and Revelation 20:11- 15 were read. In regard to this passage, he notes, 'If there is no name [in the Book of Life in Revelation 20:12] that one will be thrown into hell, but it seems God waits before passing [final] judgement'. (Đen_C6-2m) The heart of the ceremony involved writing the names of each deceased person on a piece of white paper:

> One asks for one's relatives, since while they were living, they could not receive Jesus as Saviour, so now we ask for their forgiveness. We pray and the paper is offered to God. A second person burns the paper, and prays a second time. After offering this to God, then… [speaking] offer [the] names to God, so that He will receive them. Then the eldest son will pray with the plate [containing the names on the paper]. Then the family and relatives are invited to eat a meal together. (Đen_C6-2m)

At the conclusion of the ceremony, to which the entire church was invited, as well as available extended family members, they performed the LTT. The reading the of name is similarly performed at LDG locative rituals, which invokes the ancestor by calling their name. In this LKN, the purpose is to request that the soul be united with God forever. Re-materializing of semiotic form (versus dematerializing for purification as taught by HTTL church dogma) is also in evidence here, through the pronouncing of the names of the dead, as is seen in the LDG ceremonies (see Chapter Two). (Keane 2007:9) This is a near reversal in meaning, for the LDG's purpose is for the dead to reunite with the living family. In creating this ritual, the family demonstrated 'sacrality of remembrance 'of the filial disposition, mutual obligation (*ơn* and *biết ơn*) is not expressed directly toward the ancestor, except as intercession to God on behalf of the deceased, (versus direct communication), in the hopes that God would intervene in bringing their deceased family members into eternity with Him. In this way they felt they had kept within the boundaries

of the taught VNE dogmas, but also fulfilled filial duties toward God and toward the deceased. During his interview, I asked Mr Đen if performing the ceremony brought him peace. He responded, 'we pray to God, and ask Him to forgive them. We don't know if God will answer, but we can ask'. He then told me, with tears in his eyes, 'my parents never heard the gospel message, so what can I do? I must do something'. (Wise Journal 6, 2016:39) The need for this expression of filiality is increased due not only to his family's loss during wartime, and the fact that he is not sure of their place in the afterlife, but the intrinsic need to express filiality. After performing the LDG, he told me, 'before I did this ceremony, I often remembered my parents, [who] could not hear the message of the gospel, it's very sad. Even though my parents have died, the Eternal God is highest Lord over all'… If God forgives or does not forgive, we don't know, but we must ask, we must intercede, though we only do it once … In the Bible, God says we shouldn't ask again and again, when we pray, don't keep repeating it over and over [as it says in] Matthew'. (Đen, C6-2m) These actions show improvisation with existing didactic material as well as self-theologizing and agency in creating new ritual for non-Christian relatives which was not seen in any other VNE churches in this research. Their willingness to immigrate and previous feelings of oppression in terms of local governmental controls led them toward new improvisational practices.

5.6 Limitations and Lack in Filial Practises

QHL Nguyen explains the VNE hermeneutic regarding filiality:

> Children also continue to honor their deceased parents by virtue of their moral living. Respect is due to parents in life and after death on the basis of their children's moral conducts. For evangelical Vietnamese Christians, filial piety exists in the form of purely moral conduct within the family. This understanding of filial piety can be clearly seen from Tran Hoang, a forty-nine-year-old high school teacher: 'Filial piety means to love parents and take care of them when they are alive. After they pass away, let no one disgrace them by the way you live, and tell your children the good memories of their grandparents'. (2013:181)[69] [sic]

[69] See also Smith (1987:101) for descriptions of 'living piety' in Hong Kong and China.

In defining the parameters of filial expression among VNEs, she 'respect is due to parents in life and after death on the basis of their children's moral conduct'. There is no sacredness here, only moral duty, though concepts of *ơn* and *biết ơn* as components of filiality are indicated, and are compatible with the data in this research. VNEs have attempted to re-shape the traditional view of filial piety by cleansing out anything indicative of communicating (even symbolically) with deceased loved ones both through indoctrination (in Sunday school teachings and sermons), and particularly, through social exclusion.

All the pastors and leaders within this data except one still participated to a degree in all traditional filial based rituals, including Buddhist funerals, (C1-14m) grave visitations, the yearly LDG (minus lighting incense and eating offered food) (C4-15m, 2015) visiting grandparents' and parents' graves at Lunar New Year (C4-11f), and occasionally, on the Grave-Sweeping day (Mai, C3-1f) held in the spring. Some of this (especially for female VNEs) may be due to social pressure but much of it was simply because of the continued *habitus* of filiality that permeate all aspects of cultural life in Vietnam, for to do so is natural, right, and appropriate, as some said: 'it seems the good thing to do', 'we must be wise' 'it would be offensive not to' 'it would hurt someone's feelings', 'I want my children to remember' and they did not see any sinful behaviour attached to it, if they could edit out unacceptable actions, particularly those which included visual forms and embodied ritual of bowing and lighting incense. The dispositions of the traditional filiality *habitus* dictate the need for continued participation within the parameters allowed them *vis à vis* VNE doctrine, despite serious limitations. These VNEs desired to perform these duties out of duty, respect, love and remembrance, both to the living and the dead, yet are caught in the conflict of being forced to restrain actions related to the sacrality of remembrance, nearly always seen as superstitious or idolatrous, due to lack of agency. No rituals are encouraged by churches which aid VNEs

in celebrating the memory of non-Christians, and few perform (or have the permission to perform) any ceremony to Christian ancestors. Seemingly no theology exists in addressing those who have died without hearing the Christian gospel, or those who may have heard the message, but are unsure of their faith and commitment to Christ.[70] While it is evident that VNEs continue to feel a need for filial expression, very few attempts at improvisation were seen among contributors in developing filial domestic Christian ritual, except for the case just discussed, above. However, due to the central filial disposition and social constraints, VNEs, including leaders, show a surprising amount of tolerant behaviour in spite of the perceived ban on participation in non-Christian spiritual activities. Passive attendance is tolerated, though not encouraged in some settings.[71]

5.7 Unresolved Conflict with General Society regarding Sacrality of Remembrance

VNEs struggle to find proper means of remembrance for those who have died, for they are constantly confronted with the prohibitions regarding offerings, fear social exclusion and loss of status, as discussed above, or simply quietly attend and participate without telling those in the church. A few VNEs denigrated the LDG ritual; for example, Leader__ (C8- m) who mentioned that it was a 'waste of money 'and 'it was useless'. However, most VNEs felt a need to show some ritual form of remembrance. (Bữu, C1-9m, Phuong, CVK-3f, Ha, C8-3f, Mai, C3-1f) They all struggled with the lack of an acceptable means of doing such, both within VNE communities, but especially, in general society.

VNEs behaviour is often irreconcilable with society at large in spite of continuous attempts to avoid conflict. One severe conflict arose when a well-known VNE pastor attended the funeral of a much-loved Catholic priest in Hồ Chí Mình City, whom he had

[70] Most Evangelical denominations do not have a specific theology for this area, but Western Christians have access to many taught hermeneutics through theological materials, which VNEs do not.
[71] Pastor__(C1-14m) of C1-CCOH Anglican congregation announced from the pulpit the Buddhist funeral of a congregant's mother and encouraged members to attend.

known for many years and whom he greatly admired. Standing in front of the closed coffin, he sang a hymn and prayed a prayer as a tribute. When he finished, the priest standing at attendance, as Catholic tradition dictated, handed him a lit incense stick. The VNE pastor courteously placed it in the urn along with other lit incense sticks. (Video_YouTube_Funeral 2018) When his action became known, it was condemned as the 'worship of a dead body', for this, in the mind of some VNES in his churches, showed a lack of purification in terms of the material and non-material divide. He was forced to resign even though he was the founder, as well as, superintendent of an association of 200 churches. Various VNEs whom I met during 2018 gave me their opinions on this, and only one felt that he had done anything wrong, or had truly performed an act of idolatry toward the dead. However, the majority of his members obviously greatly feared accusations of an idolatrous action on his part. Punishment for actions such as these is social exclusion.[72] Leaders face severe discipline, even in the case described above, in which the person was simply exercising courtesy. The need for this purification has, in many cases, led to misrecognition, for, as several VNEs told me, privately, that he was just trying to show courtesy to someone he deeply respected. A few contributors simply functioned beyond the boundaries (Diễm, C5-7f), (Bác Hai, C9-3bf); these contributors were in marginalized positions, or practised outside the VNE community in secret. Leaders can never become leaders if they have any varying opinions on the topic, risking a loss of status or social exclusion. Loss of agency limits the possibility of improvisation, for example, seen in the family of Evangelist__(C4,1m).

5.8 Inculturation Key of Ông Trời as Đức Chúa Trời

An inculturation key, that of appropriating Ông Trời with Đức Chúa Trời, as was created by De Rhodes, has been adapted by VNEs; whether initially taught by missionaries, or

[72] Several months after his resignation, they did, however, re-instate him as their superintendent perhaps because they felt they had been too hasty, or because there was no one else to replace him.

simply appropriated by VNEs of their own accord is unknown. However, here we see strong agency in play: many of the VNEs I personally associated with would use this nomenclature when sharing the gospel with those around them, correlating Ông Trời with Đức Chúa Trời as the Christian God. One contributor went even further: Pastor___(C2-7m), speaking to Mrs Trung (C2-2f), in finding out that she gave offerings of fruit on the altar of Ông Trời encouraged her to appropriate Ông Trời as Đức Chúa Trời. In his long discussion with her, attempting point her toward a Christian faith, he even suggested that she might ask him to forgive sinful action while at the altar. Other data seen is a videoed evangelistic service done by a HTTL church in the Mekong Delta, whose pastor used the term Ơn Trời [Trời's Blessings/Favor] to present the gospel of Jesus Christ. (Hội Thánh Tin Lành 2018), actively associating the term with Đức Chúa Trời as Trời,then segueing into a salvation message introducing Jesus Christ. The use of this particular term was seen in data as well as often seen in my personal experiences, and VNEs willingly embrace this as a contextual key. While VNEs are unaware of De Rhodes deliberate inculturation key, they intuitively appropriate it and often use this in their evangelistic activities.

5.9 Other Barriers Limiting Improvisation: Fear of the Visual

As discussed in Chapter Four, pictures previously placed on an AV altar must be destroyed along with the altar, for they were used as objects of worship. Tablets, that pre-dated pictures, were traditionally considered to contain the soul of the deceased, though currently often both tablets and pictures may function synonymously. Until the twentieth century, no photographic images of family members were in existence, so the 'presence ' of the ancestor centred around the ancestral tablet. No image was associated with this; the tablet simply contains the deceased person's name or lineage, however, it was considered to be either 'the image of the soul' or 'the resting place of the soul'. (Ch'oe

1988: 41-2) Most Evangelicals saw the tablet as 'the resting place of the soul', which was deemed impossible, (Reimer, 1975:159) thus, simply a superstition to be discarded, or a dangerous practice which could provide an opening for evil spirits to enter, as some VNE contributors noted. Other interpretations are possible here: Jesuits and some Catholic missions saw the tablet as the 'image of the soul' and thus, allowed AV rites to continue, for if the soul was not present on the altar, or residing in a tablet, they interpreted the meaning of the tablets in terms of memorial. (Ch'oe 1988:41-2)

When Evangelical missions came to Vietnam early in the twentieth century, these prohibitions were always applied, whether tablets, photographs, or both, were present, for this constituted the worship of an idol, and pictures or tablets had to be destroyed. If the tablet, or the picture is actually seen to contain the person's soul, then worshipping it would be considered to be an idolatrous act. A few have critically assessed this issue: Professor Truong (C8-4 m) noticed that the invocation to call ancestors back to the altar at the LDG in Central Vietnam, stating that this included a command to send away the demons, for this ritual 'was not for them'. He felt that this confirmed for him as a Christian, that AV rites were not actually rituals to demons. In a discussion with a VNE leader many years ago, I asked whether it would be acceptable to place a Christian version of the ancestral altar in a VNE home, with a picture of Jesus, a Bible and a cross. One leader responded, 'but then they would worship the picture of Jesus' (Journal 8, 2015:15), indicating that the average Vietnamese person would not be able to conceptualize God as an unseen, infinite being, but simply a created object. Yet, all Vietnamese worship Ông Trời who is an unseen, and, possibly an infinite, being. The fear of the visual, and acts of embodied worship in ritual is extremely common among Western Evangelical churches and began quite early in Christianity (similar to a Jewish orthopraxy which forbade images of all kinds). This fear is easily transmitted into a tabu, as Tillich writes:

> This is related to the turn in the late Middle Ages from the emphasis on the eye to the emphasis on the ear … The background of this rejection of arts of the eye is the fear-and even the horror-of a relapse

> into idolatry ... there can be no doubt that the arts of the eye are more open to idolatrous demonization than the arts of the ear. But the difference is relative, and the very nature of the Spirit stands against the exclusion of the eye from the experience of its presence. (Tillich 1963:200)

A misplaced abhorrence of idolatry and fear controls these narratives. Empiricism is a defence, for it is impossible for the soul to return. A demonic substitute for the deceased person's soul may take up residence and do harm to those participating in a rite.[73] This fear of images, that is, pictures, of ancestors that may have been associated with altars, greatly hinders possibilities in terms of the creation of new rituals, due to focusing on prosaic rituals of the ear. When I asked Mrs Mai if she had ever thought of having some type of ceremony during the LKN beyond just a meal and a prayer said over the food, she responded, 'but how? The pastor does not come to preach'. (C3-1f) She had never considered any type of ritual that would include pictures or ritual action, for only 'the arts of the ear 'were acceptable, and any activity associated with a deceased person must be performed for the ear only. This fear, for VNEs, even extends at times, to placing the picture of a deceased member on the wall of their house, and, in past times, in some areas, the use of a cross in a home. Douglas noted, 'crosses were also not allowed … because of the Catholic influence' (Douglas, MC-4f) The fear of it being seen as a crucifix could induce worship of the cross itself.[74]

Added to this is not only elimination of pictures, but all other items such as incense, candles, altar vessels, and in many cases, clerical clothing. VNE churches do not even use candles. In only one church location (C6), in Cambodia, were pictures and candles used, during the LKN ritual created by the family of Mr Đen. (Đen, C6-2m) His daughter Sambath (C6-1f) expressed hesitance about this (Wise Journal 6, 2016:39) This in itself is a great diversion from standard VNE practice, for ecclesial ceremony and

[73] Note that VNEs were rather vague about how this could occur: was it because of syncretized forms with other spirit beings, such as Quan Âm, or could a demon invade the ancestral altar? Interestingly, in North Vietnam there is, at least, in some rural areas, a belief that the altar needs to be protected from evil spirits. (Malarney 2002:96)

[74] This may have only been applied in homes in certain areas, as most HTTL churches have a large cross on the church apex, and many have crosses in their sanctuary.

custom would strictly forbid the use of all such objects. One exception to this is, at least in recent times is seen at VNE funerals. It is common for the deceased's picture to be placed on the coffin until burial. But in no case is any form of altar allowed in the home after the funeral. Two contributors had a picture of a deceased family member displayed in a place where it could not be construed as a place of worship (for example over a door, or in a glass cabinet) (C3-1f, C4-15m), but these are seldom seen in VNE homes. One younger pastor indicated that a family table with the person's picture, a cross and a Bible would be desirable (C4-16m), but no other leaders found this acceptable; one mentioned that pictures were all right if it was only decorative. (C4-15m)

5.9.1 Replacement Versus Improvisation in the LDG Ritual

VNEs never indicated that the LDG ritual could be modified, but it felt it needed to be totally replaced by purely Christian practice, such as the Lễ Kỳ Niệm ceremony. This is part of the fear of ritualistic activity reminiscent of an LDG. As several indicated, the only 'real 'reason to attend was to witness to non-believers. (C4-3f; CVK-2f; C4-10m) While some enjoyed going in order to meet extended family, VNEs who had been Christians for a length of time felt that it was only appropriate to regard it as a negative event. It was a duty that must be carefully negotiated in order to avoid sin, or avoided totally. Thus, to re-shape an LDG (even if one had the authority to do so) would be seen as unacceptable. There are too many undesirable actions: burning incense, the candles on the altar, the pictures of dead relatives who were invited to return, ancestral tablets, and (in some cases) votive papers, the actions of bowing, speaking to ancestors, and of course, the meal, which was 'eating with dead people'.

The goal of VNE leadership is to replace the perceived superstitious attitudes, within the LDG, with foreign values, which are perceived as higher, or more 'civilized'. Mrs Phuong stated, 'here in the city, it is more civilized, they just remember those who

died, but in [the countryside] it is different'. (CVK- 2f) One VNE senior pastor stated directly that he felt it was a goal of the Vietnamese church to be a counter-cultural agent in society in by aiding in the elimination of bad practices:

> The church is correcting that concept in people's hearts, proving to people that this is not unfilial, but we are truly filial. That is taking care of your parents when they are alive and being obedient to them. When they die, they can't enjoy any offerings from us. The church is trying to correct that concept in society. (C3-7m)

This duty to de-visualize and the prohibition on embodied ritual in providing a means of remembrance is a great hindrance in terms of finding expressions for the inscribed trait of the sacrality of remembrance and leaves VNEs in a conflicted and undesirable position, 'sitting on the fence' having no outlet for these expressions. They are unable to participate joyfully in Vietnamese society's rituals and traditions.

5.10 Incomplete Expressions of 'Sacrality of Remembrance 'through Inculturation

Several examples given above demonstrate that the inculturation of *hiếu kính cha mẹ* is, in fact, a continuation of the pre-Christian filial dispositions seen across society, with a very important distinction: the lack of the sacrality of remembrance seen through the veneration of the deceased ancestors. The inculturation link may be a starting point for discussion of local theology within VNE orthopraxy, but is incomplete, and has, in many cases, formed barriers to Christian enculturation due to this lack. Thus, *hiếu kính cha mẹ* functions as a half-measure that allows the continuance of the inscribed *habitus*, but fails in terms of dealing with issues concerning death, both theologically, and in ritual practice. Limitations due to severe minimalization of the visual in ritual is a true barrier to enculturation, though it can be seen that VNEs continue to express a filial *habitus* throughout numerous practices, whether within the church community, or mundane activities, practising it 'on the margins' always being wary of the visual and the embodied ritual. The difficulty that arises is that the sacrality of remembrance or, what is termed 'looking to the source' deliberately ignored or eliminated, in part due to the lack of visual and embodied ritual as means of remembrance.

VNEs, out of concerns over idolatry will not acknowledge the sacrality of remembrance' overtly, however data indicated subtle forms of behaviour expressing this trait. One leader, born into a VNE family, told me, 'When I eat mint, which my father loved, I sense his presence. This is more than memory,' (C8-4m) He could not state exactly how his father's presence was with him, but, without appropriate ritual expression, he sought symbolic means of the sacral trait, communicated through food (reminiscent of the fellowship at an LDG) as a non-ritual means of filial expression. Another contributor said, 'we explain [to people when we are invited to an LDG] that it's not that we don't give offerings (*cúng*) to our parents, but this is so that people can see we give offerings in our hearts'. (C4-10m) VNEs use non-overt means of expressing the sacrality of remembrance.

Remembering one's ancestors has a higher purpose than just 'embodying assumptions about one's place Bell 2009:xi) but have the potential within an ontology that points toward Ông Trời, re-interpreted as pointing toward God Himself. AV rites aid a person not only to understand his place in family and community, but the disposition of filiality, including this trait of 'looking to the source' direct him toward God. 'Looking to the source' a Vietnamese defines in an essential way, what it means to be human, and the sacrality attached to that humanness, within the collective of one's family and lineage. I posit that Vietnamese society sees remembering the source to contain a sacral quality, and this Vietnamese expression of their understanding of the sacrality of humankind which points toward a higher deity. Vietnamese scholar, Q Phạm, quoted by Trương, states,

> Ancestor worshippers believe in the eternity and divinity of humanity: human beings have eternal souls, and human souls are from the divine. It is this divinity of their parents and their ancestors that they worship, and they believe that the divine soul/spirit of their ancestors could guide them, direct them, protect them, assist them, inspire their thoughts and their conduct, follow them, so to speak, with their eyes, their invisible eyes which cut through the secrets of life and of death and which are the sole means by which humanity could have some brief vision of its future and its destiny; in short, the souls live in their memory, in their interest, in their dream of a life still more intense than their earthly life. (2007:25)

He states clearly that ‘human souls are from the divine. The understanding of the source is yet opaque to the average Vietnamese. To know one’s origin is essential in knowing one’s place, in life, as collective place, bus is also tied to a spiritual cosmology of finding one’s place in the universe under Ông Trời, to someone bigger than oneself and to whom one owes serious obligation. This belief has always been an incomplete spiritual belief system lacking rigid dogmas and beliefs and re-interpreted by each Vietnamese lineage within the confines of enculturated traits. The sacrality of remembrance may be improvised upon, built as it already is, upon the central disposition of filiality as a fulfilment of societal belief systems versus a replacement of them (see Chapter Eight).

Chapter Six

The Lễ Tiếc Thánh as Practised by Vietnamese Evangelicals

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides descriptions of the ritual of the LTT, (or the Tiếc Thánh, CCOH-C1) among seven congregations of VNEs drawn from field data. Primary data, including observations of the performance of the ceremony itself, indicated that many VNEs appropriate the concept of *anamnesis* as the 'sacrality of remembrance', a filial disposition, which inculcates mutual obligation (*ơn* and *biết ơn*). Evidence is examined in establishing how VNE's filial disposition is expressed in the LTT.

6.2 Historical Development of the Ritual of the LTT

For five generations, HTTL churches, as well as leaders trained by the HTTL, who later founded other Protestant denominations in Vietnam) gradually formed a dogma,[75] originating in seminary training, at times transmitted only orally, but which very effectively indoctrinated the beliefs, traditions, and an underlying ethos of separation for holiness. The highly symbolized, minimalized ritual of the LTT was originally taught as a simple, de-culturized 'object lesson'. Missionary *emeritus*, Franklin Irwin, (MC-3m) who served in the Southern region of Vietnam until the regime change in 1975, stated, after he had observed HTTL performance of the LTT in the year 2000,

> [VNEs] practice the Lord's Supper in exactly the same way that we [the missionaries of an earlier generation] taught it to them…it was presented to them as the gospel was preached to them and they understood the gospel. They said "now here is an object lesson that God has given to us to help us remember the gospel. Jesus came and died for our sins…" When…taking this body, or blood as a symbol of his flesh, they accepted that, and they accepted this easily as far as I could see'.

His descriptions indicate that Zwinglian Holiness based theologies have not been altered

[75] The theology used, '*Thần Đạo Học'*, (Olsen, J. 1958), and the commentary, '*Giải Nghĩa Thờ 1 Cô-rin-to'* (Olsen, 1955), and the manual for pastors, '*Mục Sự Chỉ Nam'* (Olsen, 1972) seemed to be the full range of resource material available for pastors and leaders-in-training for many years. Olsen, an early missionary, produced all of this material and it is still used extensively today.

by HTTL churches. Besides the HTTL-C3 congregation, other more recently formed denominations led by pastors who had been trained by the HTTL mother denomination (C2, C4, C5, and C6), transmitted an identical ethos undergirded by dogmas and presentations used in HTTL churches. Three early missionary contributors of earlier decades concurred in their recollections of the presentation of the LTT. (MC-1m, MC-3m, MC-4)

Early missionaries understood something of the importance of filiality toward living parents, but certainly did not realize the centrality of the filial *habitus* which undergirded the foundation of all of life (Liu, 2003; Hsiao, 1965:326-7) and an inculcated trait of sacramental remembrance. Since all of these first-generation missionaries are deceased, none of those spoken with were directly involved in establishing ecclesial dogma, and were little involved in performing the LTT. By the second generation of HTTL existence, indigenous pastors were solely in charge of services, due to adherence to the Three-Self methodology. The Manual of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, used by both the mission agency and the group of congregations associated with it[76] states no doctrinal stance to any Eucharistic theology. It simply states that local churches should continue the 'observance of the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper'. Christian and Missionary Alliance Manual 2009) The current version of the Hội Thánh Tin Lành Constitution (Hội Thánh Tin Lành Miên Bắc 2013) does not even make this statement, but simply lists a number of ceremonies (*cái lễ*), including the LTT.

The transmission of orally transmitted dogmas has been faithful carried out as *anamnesis*, but was appropriated in many cases, as a sacrality of remembrance an inculcated filial disposition, with ontological implications. One's duty to be in a state of holiness is the reciprocal obligation necessary in order to be worthy to express this sacrality of remembrance. This is the cycle of mutual obligation one is placed under as a

[76] The C & MA never officially became a denomination until 1974.

means of worthiness in order to continue to receive the LTT.

6.3 Eucharistic Hermeneutic and Orthopraxis

Certain points of interpretation and presentation of the LTT utilized by most VNE leaders (with noted exceptions described) over nearly five generations have formed into a fixed dogma. A reaction to and rejection of all Roman Catholic doctrine in terms of transubstantiation has become a focal point of VNE doctrine: the bread and the cup are not the body and blood of Jesus, but rather a *hình bóng* (shadow or picture) (C6-3f) or *tượng trưng* (representation). (C4-15m) Due to the fear that congregants may accidentally misunderstand Jesus' words, VNE leaders are careful to avoid any verbiage which might confuse congregants, and out of a fear that they might think that a 'magical' exchange has occurred. 'This is my body' a dangerous phrase for VNEs, who greatly fear the influence of Catholicism and erect defensive theological barriers around it. The greatest fear indicated by pastors contributing was the fear that it would be misunderstood as a Catholic performance, which to them was indicative of idolatrous practice. Most leaders, (C2, C3, C4, C6, C7), in explaining what the LTT meant to them immediately begin from the defensive position that the bread and cup are not the actual body and blood of Jesus, but only representative. A definitive Zwinglian theology has been taught and is adhered to in terms of remembrance, but the reactions to Catholic doctrine were particularly emphasized. Six pastors interviewed were careful to delineate this distinction. Pastor___(C4-16m) echoed a standard VNE hermeneutic:

> Faith does not rest on transubstantiation, meaning that the bread is truly God's [Jesus'] body and the blood is [Jesus'] blood. We don't believe this, but believe this is a symbol, the bread and the cup are the representation, a symbol of the body and blood of God [Jesus].

This defensive reaction to Catholic doctrine, however, aids in shoring up the hermeneutic of remembrance and the sacrality of remembrance of Jesus' death. Due to the filial disposition of 'looking to the source' there is a natural transition of this Vietnamese epistemology and aids in looking toward the sacrality of remembrance' that is,

commemorating Jesus' death as part of a VNE orthopraxy in defining the meaning of the LTT. 'Do this in remembrance of Me' forms the locus of VNE orthopraxy in terms of the LTT; an implicit theology of *anamnesis*, but inscribed with the habituation of the sacrality of remembrance.

One's responsibility is also to '*hướng đến Chú*a', that is, to concentrate on Christ's work on the cross during these sacred minutes, in order to 'fellowship with His death'. In a culture which places its central virtue on remembrance of significant ancestors, this resonates with VNEs who, as Christians want to identify with Christ, and his sacrifice for us, and replace this with the sacred remembrance of the death of Jesus as a memorial. However, if these actions are not done properly, one may be subject to God's judgement. The dogma teaching separation for holiness is interpreted from Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 11:17-33, so that any possibility of abusing the privilege of participating in the LTT is carefully eliminated. The words of 1 Corinthians 11:24 commonly used, do not contain the explicit term, 'this is my body, this is my blood', which could be misunderstood as literal. As well, 1 Corinthians 11:17-33 gives each participant the needed 'checklist' so that one is certain to be in a state of holiness. This is done through separation in terms of frequency, and particularly as a serious duty toward commemoration of Jesus' death at the time of partaking of the LTT. Confession of sin is done just previous to partaking of it. Each participant accepts her serious duty to 'proclaim His death until He comes' as a duty of evangelism. Finally, the commitment to a foreign form of ecclesial practice of the LTT (discussed in Chapter Seven) discourages the perception, or understanding of that filial disposition, or that sacrality of remembrance to flow through the ritual of the LTT. The privilege of being worthy through a duty of holy separation to participate in the commemoration of Jesus must also be through a God-given discernment, described by contributor DTA Nguyen:

For us to receive the spiritual blessings of the LTT is not as simple a matter as participating in [the

> ceremony]. We must 'discern the Lord's body', meaning that we must judge spiritually the truth of the meaning of the bread and the cup. This distinguishing of the truth comes from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit causes all of this to become true when we stand before the Lord's Table. (2003:71)

The participant, through confession of sin, practises one's filial duty to God by making absolutely sure one's sin is confessed before partaking of the elements, thus one may receive from God in the LTT. [77] (Chauvet, 1995) The obligation one is under to God in order to receive these blessings is to understand before partaking, to distinguish (*phân biệt*), (to become separated) in order to perform one's obligation to God before participating. This is described as taking the LTT by faith, or 'it comes true when we stand before the Lord's Table'. The blessings received are that of the privilege of continuing to be a member of the body of Christ, or as one contributor said, 'one feels blessed' (C4-1m), or in some cases, healing was a possibility. (C6-1f, 3f,4f) (C2-5m) However, these blessings, as taught by the mother denomination HTTL (C3) were usually seen in general and vague terms. Several leaders (C4-16m) (C8-4m) also mentioned that the LTT was a sign of unity, seen in the 'one loaf' mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11:29. When the entire congregation is focused on Jesus' death in one accord, spiritual unity was achieved. However, no church in these locations used a loaf, or any physical symbols of unity, but rather machine-produced hosts, distributed on a communion tray.

Congregations (CCOH-C1) (Anglican) and (HTGL-C4) (Methodist) embraced sacramental theology, though some members who had come from other VNE churches continued to embrace a Zwinglian symbolic theology; the bread and cup were merely representative, not the means of receiving grace. While the presentation of the sacral meal is presented in a highly symbolic manner, it still became, implicitly, a means of receiving God's grace for the forgiveness of sin, and was often seen as a means of becoming more virtuous. An exception was seen in congregation (HTLAS-C7), which emphasized it as

[77] Exceptions to this are discussed, as seen in congregation, (HTLAS-C7), that teaches a Christus Victor theology.

the power to overcome sin and bondage, although many members had come to this congregation from other VNE (and in one case, a Catholic) churches. While unstated in these churches, in fact, some sacramental theology was implicit. The LTT became, as Augustine stated, 'an outward sign of an inward grace that has been instituted by Jesus Christ'. (Lyden, Mazur, Michael 2015:180) The visible signs of the bread and cup are deliberately simplified as to not place emphasis on objects, yet, each person, as he fulfils his filial duty, may be assured of receiving grace in terms of forgiveness from God, and continue along the path of salvation.

6.4 Obligation and Sacrality of Remembrance Revealed within the LTT

The filial *habitus* in the LDG was examined in Chapter Three. Is a filial *habitus* in evidence in the performance of the LTT? Contributors' descriptions indicated both mutual obligation (*ơn* and *biết ơn*), as well as a solemn duty to remember Jesus 'death for us; this sacred quality, I posit, is the 'sacrality of remembrance 'as discussed in Chapter Three and Four, but appropriated and expressed in the LTT toward God Himself. For example, contributors would often use the term, 'I must [implying a requirement] remember Jesus' (*mình phải nhớ*) or, (*tưởng nhớ*) (commemorate, or memorialize) not simply 'I remember,' mplying serious mutual obligation. Two pastors (Pastor__C2-5,m) (C4-1m) both stated that Jesus commanded us to do the LTT, thus it was acceptable, though ritual activity is carefully controlled.[78]

In opening prayers, the pastor may speak the words, *Tạ ơn Chúa*, (we give thanks to you, Lord) which not only includes expressions of thanks, but that of *ơn,* which implicitly speaks of obligation. The use of the word *ơn* disposes the recipients toward obligation, which along with teachings from Scripture on Jesus' sacrifice for us, and for

[78]Ritual it is seen as rather suspicious activity, due to fears of members worshipping objects and ritual actions. Pastor___ (C2-5m) said, 'Although it is a ceremony, we *must* carry it out'. *[emphasis mine].* His sense of duty and obedience to God overcame his worry over having to perform a ritual.

those with a filial disposition, each realizes the inability of repayment. At times *ơn* may refer to God's favour, but *tạ ơn* means to give thanks for that favour, showing the cycle of mutual obligation (Chauvet 1995) Others used the term *ơn* in *mình có ơn với Chúa* or *biết ơn* and two pastors used the term, '*Chúa ban ơn*' (God gives to us) in public prayer. A common opening prayer for the LTT often begins, *Chung con tạ ơn Chúa* (All of us, your children, are obligated to give thanks, to you, Lord). In many cases, when *ơn* is used, an implicit sense of mutual obligation expresses the underlying filial disposition. These expressions are triggers reinforcing the filial habituation, implying obligation. VNE contributors were very careful to fulfil all duties surrounding the LTT. Soucy (2006) states, 'Fundamentally, *on* is a concept that denotes obligation, and it is through impending repayment that ties of relationship are maintained' (Mauss 1969:31) By carefully adhering to all requirements, VNEs feel comfortable to partake of the LTT for they are carefully fulfilling filial requirements in order to receive this favor. In this way, ties of relationship to God are maintained. The word *ơn* was not always used, but, at times, 'has given so abundantly to us'. This terminology, as in the sentence, '*Chúa ban phước chung con', Chúa* ban cho, 'God has blessed us' does not include the use of the word *ơn.* VNEs use a mixture of vocabulary to discuss God's love, grace and blessings; however, *ơn* is commonly used, both in ritual expression and in everyday life to express one's position toward God. When average believers discussed the LTT, they spoke from the position of mutual obligation.

One other clue emerges here which is significant in understanding the filial disposition within the performance of the LTT. When praying to God, all forms of address are done through the personal pronoun, '*con*', or child. One never uses any other form, such as 'I', '*tôi* ' which would be acceptable in English. This form of 'we' is actually 'all of us children', '*chung con'.* This establishes a parental relationship in every respect.

6.4.1 Being Worthy to Receive: Fulfilling One's Mutual Obligation as *Ơn* and *Biết Ơn*

Mutual obligation, (*ơn* and *biết ơn*) or filial duty was pronounced in the many VNE performances of the LTT, and in many settings, was, in fact, it's essential feature. It heavily dictated the presentation of the LTT in five out of seven congregations. (C2, C3, C4, C5, C6,) The Anglican congregation (C1) taught a very carefully balanced and crafted doctrine on the Holy Communion; its' emphasis clearly on a receptionist theology of receiving gifts from the Lord's table, in the traditional Anglican ecclesiology. However, many of the congregants came from other VNE churches, and carried with them their previous habituated dispositions regarding the LTT, which came through in their interviews. (C1-1f, C1-8f, C1-9m, 2015)

A contributor (C5-1f, 2015) explained the meaning of the LTT: 'when I partake of the LTT, I must remember the favour (*cái ơn*) that God gave to me'. *Cái ơn*, of course implies the favour she has received; thus, the obligation must be returned. She further explained that when non-Christians feel the need to express mutual obligation, must *cúng* or give offerings to the deity who gave them favour; however, Christians respond by offering their lives and give obedience back to God. Asking if she was afraid of God's judgement if she did not confess her sins (*xưng tội*) beforehand, she agreed immediately, and said that she must always confess her sins before she partakes. Here is a clear description of gift exchange and obligation: God has given favour; this must be returned. One must not abuse this favour, but return it by confessing one's sins to Him. Symbolic gift exchange is in evidence in this description. (Mauss 1970) She also stressed that to return *ơn* must be done through remembrance of Christ's death for us; if we do not remember, we may become far from God and cease to obey Him. Her descriptions identified the cycle of mutual obligation.

VNE understanding of the LTT always demands serious obligation (*ơn*) and if

one is negligent in fulfilling those duties, one might even be brought under the judgment of God, as described in 1 Corinthians 11:27.[79] One bible teacher, who was raised in the VNE community, spoke of the process needed to partake of the LTT:

> We need to observe that for many years and when we become a teenager we need to do our bible class and learn our theology system and Christian theology and have to do a test to do the baptism then we pass the test then we have the baptism and after that we can have communion with the whole church, that is really a serious thing … we need to take it really seriously, at least at some points. In my life, when I am weak then I am afraid to take communion it's like…the pastor read a passage in 1 Corinthians, if you didn't take it seriously you have to bear all the consequences which is written in the Word of God. (Leader__C8-1m)

In this particular case, if one had unconfessed sin, it was seen as very serious indeed; however, not all contributors indicated such fear of being in sin and coming under condemnation. Thus, one's filial duty as a Christian when participating in the LTT is to first, make sure one's life is free of sin through confession before participating, second, fulfil one's duty to partake of the LTT, third, focus on remembering the great sacrifice that Jesus offered for us, and in this way, offer back to Him our obedience, recommitting ourselves to Him and become better Christians. In this way, VNEs intuitively, and through the Vietnamese collective *habitus* of gift-exchange (Mauss 1970) continue to express their filial duty, or *ơn,* as they participate in the LTT. Chauvet's symbolic exchange is in evidence here. (cited by Tovey 2004:18-19)

Another proscribed duty of 1 Corinthians 11:3-33 form is that of evangelism, which is required of every Christian. The Baptist pastor of congregation (HTBTC-C5) in performing the LTT, during his prayer after the elements were distributed, said, 'Help us remember to proclaim your death to everyone, everywhere' (*rảo truyền sự chết của Chúa cho đến mỗi nơi*), part of the VNE hermeneutic of 1 Corinthians 11: 26: 'when you do this … proclaim His death until He comes'. This duty to evangelism duty is taken very seriously, in the cycle of mutual obligation of *ơn*. Mrs Lạc explained, 'we must share about God with everyone around; we MUST go out to share about that to people. (C2-1f,

[79] 'So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord'. (NIV)

2015) This description evidences the obligation she feels in return for the favour of participating in the LTT. Only in the congregation of (HTLAS-C7), an independent charismatic church planted by a local Vietnamese pastor, were the traits of mutual obligation not seen in contributors' answers, for the taught hermeneutic focused extensively on partaking of the LTT as the means of a victorious life, including victory over evil spirits and sickness (see 2.7).

6.5 Proper Ritual Expression Fulfilling Filial Obligation

The HTTL mother denomination of Vietnam (C3) has, over time, highly ritualized the LTT ceremony. Other locations, except (HTLAS-C7) showed influence from the HTTL denomination. In (HTTL-C3) churches, at times, the outward ritual actions seemed to be the substance of worship itself. This emphasis on external performance does not necessarily mean that internal motivations are not just as significant, however. In Asian epistemologies in pre-Christian rites, the ritual/s may itself be the expression of worship; feelings and attitudes are submerged under the proper presentation of the ritual. For example, lighting incense sticks is an act of worship, it is not contingent upon the internal belief and attitude of the person performing it. In many LTT ceremonies, it could be seen that the performance was of greatest importance, for this was an expression of one's duty to God Himself. One former missionary felt that '[The LTT] was always performed in a very mechanical way' (MC-1m_Reimer 2014) with great attention to the ritual itself. He readily admitted that he did not understand what inner motivations compelled them to this presentation. While this may have seemed 'mechanical' to outsiders, the physical actions were themselves, worship, performed in the cycle of mutual obligation, of which for proper execution of ritual was very important to achieve this expression. These expressions, both in AV rites and the performance of the LTT, as a ritual carried out properly, is also a proper expression of filiality. As one expresses remembrance to Jesus and His death in the sacral meal, the underlying motivation for this is often one which

inculcates filial duty, not simply, remembrance, as one would see in Western Evangelical ceremonies of the Lord's Supper.

Rituals, at least in southern Vietnam, have become more relaxed due to the weakening of Confucian societal systems. However, in expression of the LTT ritual this is not the case: it is not only imperative to give expression of one's duty in the cycle of mutual obligation, separation for holiness is always seen. Many VNE leaders have deliberately elevated all expressions of the LTT. For example, DTA Nguyen tells us

> Today the methods of performing the LTT, in most churches, are performed according to their own methods but all of these must be done in an appropriate and solemn manner. We must firmly follow the teachings of the Lord Jesus as we carry it out. (Nguyen DTA 2006:72)

An atmosphere of solemnity is particularly notable in (HTTL-C3) churches during the LTT, which creates a sense of holiness. A special hymn is sung (Thánh Ca #400) which is extremely solemn and reminds the congregants of the list of spiritual truths and duties of the LTT that the Pastor has already expounded upon. Solemnity and deep respect were stressed by contributors.

6.5.1 Frequency of Participation in the LTT

While most objects and ritual actions are strictly unacceptable to VNEs, those unacceptable components have, in some cases, been replaced with other ritualistic actions, determining the frequency of reception of the LTT. All VNE churches performed the LTT on the first Sunday of the month, the only exceptions being (CCOH-C1), due to its long tradition of liturgy surrounding the Holy Communion and house church (HTLAS-C7). The issue of frequency is currently debated among pastors, indicated in several interviews. One pastor (C4-15m 2015) said, 'I think we should take it often, though others have said, "no, that makes it too common."' However, he continued to follow the status quo and perform the LTT on the first Sunday of the month. A former superintendent of the Southern branch of the HTTL remarked, after the advent of the house church movement, that, 'these underground churches sometimes take the LTT more often than

once a month, *tạ giáo là gì*!' [this is heretical!] (MC-1m_Reimer 2014), indicating the need for separation of the holy and the profane, or 'separation for holiness'. (Durkheim, 2001) Sixteen VNE contributors mentioned that it was traditionally, or even should be, taken once a month as a duty of re-consecration and remembrance. However, too often would indicate it as a profane, versus a truly separated, holy ceremony. This may also be reactionism to Roman Catholic practices, which advocate for daily reception. The cyclical performance of one's duty and obligation give assurance of being in a place of holiness.

6.6 Anamnesis Appropriated and Expressed as the Trait of Sacrality of Remembrance

Field data showed that the trait of sacred remembrance, that is, the sacrality of remembrance, as most discussed by VNEs contributors. Thirty-seven VNE contributors were interviewed, and thirty-four discussed the LTT in terms of' remembering Jesus death [or passion]' 'remembering what Jesus did for me through His sacrifice', at times using the stronger term, *tương nhớ* to 'commemorate' or 'memorialize' versus simply, *nhớ,* 'remember'.

In many cases, particularly in the HTTL setting, 1 Corinthians 11:23-33 is utilized throughout the service as a critical part of the rite, for it tells those participating what must be done to fulfil Jesus' command, 'Do this in remembrance of Me'. Remembrance is the command of Jesus; thus, fulfilling this command through a proper ritual is imperative as a filial duty, defined as mutual obligation. To do the LTT ceremony without proper propriety would be disrespectful, and dishonouring; it would not be a true expression of *ơn* and *biết ơn.* Not only would this be a denigration of one's obligation, but a violation of the sacred duty toward remembrance of the death of Jesus.

Illustration 6:1 Photo: (Wise 06-15) It reads, in English: 'Do this in remembrance of Me 1 Corinthians 11:24'

6.7 The Trait of Separation of the Sacred and the Profane as Imposed by an Evangelical Holiness Sacramentality

VNE leadership takes great care to separate the sacred and the profane in congregations (C1, C2, C3, C4, C5 C6) and the ritual is done within strict form, carefully separated from anything which would hint of Catholic doctrine.[80] VNE leaders greatly fear that congregants will misunderstand the LTT and assume the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. (Olsen, J. 1958:1026-1034) Most leaders, explaining 'what the LTT meant to them' would immediately begin from the defensive position that the bread and cup are not the actual body and blood of Jesus. Pastor__C4-16m echoed the standard VNE hermeneutic:

> Faith does not rest on transubstantiation, meaning that the bread is truly God's [Jesus'] body and the blood is [Jesus'] blood. We don't believe this, but believe this is a symbol, the bread and the cup are the representation, a symbol of the body and blood of God [Jesus]. (2015)

[80] The presentation of the Holy Communion in the Anglican congregation C1-CCOH, is something of an exception, and one contributor from an HTTL church believed she should not partake due to its appearance. However, this pastor (trained in Singapore) had deliberately embraced a new hermeneutic and was not afraid of breaking the status quo.

This defensive reaction to Catholic doctrine also aids in shoring up its meaning as a symbolic memorial, separating it from the perception of objects having supernatural power. The mother denomination (HTTL-C3) does not state any established theology of the Eucharist but is undergirded implicitly by Zwinglian dogmas. Nevertheless, it is performed as a sacramental act and carefully separated from all profane activity. This ethos is re-transmitted through sermons before each LTT ceremony once a month.

Common to many Evangelical denominations, the early C & MA missionaries taught that the unbaptized should not partake of the LTT (discussed by 18 contributors), as a prescribed means of separation of the be uncommitted, insincere, or those still committed to other spiritual deities (including ancestors). The pastor performing the ceremony states this before distributing the elements. Trang (C5-1f) told me that she was very happy after her baptism, as she did not have to feel excluded from partaking of the LTT. This meant she was a fully accepted member, and in a special place of favour. Mrs Lạc, C2-1f 2015), described the first time she was permitted to participate in the LTT:

> Yes, the first time I didn't know what it means. Good, I enjoy the LTT with everyone, but trông lạ (strange) but '*rất là thích thu'* [very interesting] '*rất là thích'* [very enjoyable] *Con cũng thấy, cái gì đó có thiêng liêng* [It seemed like something very holy].[81]

Mrs Lạc clearly saw the LTT as a very holy, sacral event, but distinctly foreign, and, clearly, did not understand it. Pastor ___(C4-15m) said

> The first time, it is very strange, they don't understand the meaning, if they understand the meaning they will understand the holy nature of the LTT. So, if the LTT is organized once a month, then it is a reminder, conscientiously teaching it before partaking.

This foreign-ness, in bringing in an acculturation is seen as necessary and required, even though new converts were left in the dark. Since the separation of the holy versus the profane is little understood by any except those trained in theology the LTT. It must be studied, but could still seem mysterious unless interpreted as the filial disposition. Contributor Leader___(C8-2m) stated

> Before, when I first believed in God, I didn't think much about [the LTT] but after the Easter season, I just saw the suffering God endured on the cross, I saw the meaning of God's death and I commemorate

[81] Contributors who spoke English would often mix both Vietnamese and English vocabulary together.

[*tưởng nhớ*] [His] death when I take the LTT.

He, as other contributors, understood the event as 'commemoration', not simply remembrance, elevating this concept of *anamnesis* and the need to sacralise remembrance of Jesus' death. The strict emphases by pastoral leadership on the LTT as a separated, holy ritual is mainly taught through 1 Corinthians 11, and focuses on the need to partake of the LTT in a worthy manner. God's judgment may ensue if those partaking do not fulfil these conditions adequately. These requirements place the LTT in a separated space of holiness. Pastor _(Focus Group 2, 2016) stated 'the LTT is a ceremony that is a mystery; the LDG is [only] a common ceremony in the lives of people'.

The enculturated traits of *ơn* and *biết ơn* which are focused on duty and mutual obligation are not overtly taught by VNE leaders, who focus on Evangelical/Holiness theologies and attempt to enforce the conditions for partaking the LTT through the nearly universally used passage in 1 Corinthians 11:23-33, and the extremely limited pastoral scholarly materials available. (Olsen, 1955, 1958) The enculturated virtue of filiality emerges in data findings in spite of leadership's teachings that come directly from Scripture. The taught Holiness dogmas and hermeneutic requiring separation as a means of attaining holiness placed boundaries around the LTT, and have been in many cases, re-interpreted as very serious mutual obligation toward God. VNEs have not appropriated the LTT exactly as the Apostle Paul would have wished, for they see it as placing one in the cycle of mutual obligation. (Tovey 1988:17) Yet, due to these inhabituated dispositions, duty is sincerely and authentically expressed toward God, yet layered over with reified abstract presentation and dogma passed on by the foreign mission.

6.8 The LTT as Proscribed by 1 Corinthians 11: 17-33: Duty and Judgment

During the explanation of the LTT done each month, before the distribution of the elements, the Scripture passage of abuses of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23-33 are nearly always read; the synoptic gospels are rarely mentioned. This passage

functioned for many churches as a modified liturgy and a 'duty checklist', that, if a person carefully adhered to, would have certainty of being in a place of holiness before partaking of the LTT.

As the LTT ceremony begins, the pastor will usually begin by referring to this passage, or reading it. The locus of the passage for VNEs is in verse 24, 'Do this in remembrance of Me' ('*Hãy làm điều này để nhớ đến Ta*') which is often embroidered on altar cloths. The word '*Hãy*' is an imperative, thus at least one contributor noted that 'Jesus commanded it'. (C4-1m, 2014) This, in itself, was reason enough to do it, for one must obey Christ's command. However, contributors usually saw it in deeper terms than simply obedience to a command. Secondly, and of greatest important, each participant is reminded of the need to confess one's sins before partaking. Self-examination is done before partaking in every LTT ceremony. To be in a state of internal holiness is taken seriously. Simpson states:

> It brings to us the actual bodily strength of the Lord Jesus Christ if we rightly partake. And so, on the other hand, it brings to us sickness and death if we abuse it. The two-edged sword cuts both ways, either in blessing or in judgment as we meet it. There is no doubt that many Christians are suffering from sickness, and perhaps their very lives have been shortened because they have sat down at this holy table cherishing willfully unholy resentments and knowingly indulging in forbidden things. (1888:209)

Before the distribution of elements of the bread and juice, a time of private prayer and confession is designated, to '*tư xét mình'* 'confess one's sins', to be sure that one is ready to receive. Upon my question, 'Do you ever feel afraid that if you take the LTT but don't ask forgiveness for your sins or will be judged by God?' contributor (Trang, C5-1f) responded, 'Yes, I do. So, when I take it, I must ask forgiveness for my sins, and when I ask forgiveness before I take it, then my heart feels lighter, and more comforted'. Other contributors concurred with statements such as these. (C1-1f, C2-1f, C4-1m)

The LTT is introduced each time by the leading pastor and is always re-explained before the actual ceremony of bread and cup begins. It is very important, as noted, that

the sacred meaning is explained, and this is an essential part of its holy nature. The Anglican congregation, (CCOH-C1), followed the specific liturgical form including creedal confession of sin, and the culmination of coming to the Lord's Table to receive. This read liturgy did not place the recipient in the place of obligation as in congregations C2, C3, C4, C5 and C6. In these congregations, the LTT is re-explained by the pastor, in case a new believer is present, or to make sure that all congregants understand and faithfully carry out their duty to examine themselves for sinful behaviour, ask forgiveness, and be free from sinful behaviour before participating. Also, Pastor (C3-7m 2015) explained, if they are new believers, they may be influenced by Catholic belief that the bread and the cup are [Jesus'] actual body and blood. So, each time, the pastor should remind them'.

Each congregant should then *hướng đến Chúa* '[look toward God] … remembering very seriously what Jesus has done for us'. C4-2f) and 'In the moment of meditating solemnly we must direct our hearts to the Lord'. (Nguyen DTA 2006) During this time, the congregation feels strong unity as each meditates upon Jesus 'death, and since each person has individually asked for forgiveness of sin, and received that forgiveness. At this point, the pastor prays over the bread and it is distributed. He then prays over the cup and it is also distributed. Each congregant waits in silence until the final prayer is prayed, during which the pastor re-iterates thanksgiving for forgiveness and salvation through Jesus 'death. After the bread and cup are consumed as a congregation, the pastor prays once more to conclude the ceremony, and the service, (usually nears its conclusion), continues.

Contributor (Sambath, C6-1f) a young leader in (IHCKC-C6) church, described an event which occurred in the planting of the indigenous house church. A very young Christian invited her unbelieving husband to church. Sambath, wanting to extend a courtesy, allowed him to participate with the others. Some days later, he suddenly died.

She discontinued performing the LTT for nearly a year, out of fear of God's judgment. Her belief, was, of course, done from a very concrete, but misguided interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11: 29-30.[82] This was not uncommon thinking for VNEs, who often discussed the fear of judgement for partaking unworthily. Mrs Khanh, (C1-1f) said, 'one's faith must be complete, one must be taught and surrendered or we will be judged by God'. A leader in a para-church organization, (C8-1m) who came from an HTTL (C3) background, told me, 'When I am weak then I am afraid to take communion, … the pastor reads a passage in 1 Corinthians 11, if you didn't take it seriously you have to bear all the consequences which is written in the Word of God'. A seminary student wrote in his thesis, '[we must] be careful of participating in the LTT without repenting of sin in our lives. The LTT is an opportunity for us to look in our hearts and confess our sins before God (1 Corinthians 11:27-32)'. (Nguyen, DTA 2003)

The VNE dogmas which established punishment for unconfessed sinful behaviour is infused with the traditional belief that Heaven, Ông Trời[83] also punishes one's evil behaviour. Partaking of the LTT in an abusive manner also had similar consequence. The judgment from Ông Trời correlated closely to what a number of VNEs described as the possibility of God's judgment (Đức Chúa Trời) if the LTT was abused. VNEs take the authority of Scripture quite seriously in terms of God's judgement, for the lack of a 'separation to holiness 'is reminiscent of the lack of filial piety. These imposed hermeneutics overlay their own ethical dispositions of filial obligation and creates a foreign feeling of holiness. So, while contributors participate in this foreign sense of sacredness, it remains an abstract mystery and little understood. Thus, many VNEs may default to the enculturated disposition of the sacrality of remembrance tied to filiality,

[82] However, it is also very unlikely that more mature pastors would come to the sort of extreme conclusion that this young leader (Sambath, C6-1f, 2015), did.
[83] See Khanh (C1-1f, Journal: 91-2, 2018) p. 80.

inculcated with deep sense of moral duty (*ơn* and *biết ơn*) as the underlying habituation in being permitted to partake of the privileges associated with the LTT. If one's duty is not carried out correctly, there may be consequences from God Himself, as contributors indicated.

The question should be raised, then, is there some residual belief from general society (which VNEs vehemently attempt to eradicate in all their practices) of fear of being harmed by spiritual beings may lurk in their Christian ethos? Most Vietnamese fear spiritual beings, and non-VNE contributors (C1-6m, C1-7 f, C9-1f) showed fear of evil spirits, as Mrs Khanh, (C1-1f) a VNE stated, 'you must worship someone. If you don't, you will be afraid'. The fear of negative consequences may be reminiscent of past beliefs, in which one must give certain offerings to appease the deity one is seeking favour from. (Taylor 2004) While this may be true of certain individuals, it is more likely that this fear of judgment is due to the fear of being unfilial (*bất hiếu*), considered the worst offense anyone may commit to the living or the dead. In this case, if one expresses one's obligation (as *ơn*) toward God, or does not perform the LTT in a proper, honouring and serious manner, one has not performed one's reciprocal obligation. If someone is lacking proper filial expression, becomes lax, forgetful, or abusive in the way they perform their worship duties, coupled with strong belief in the authority of Scripture, (which speaks of God as a just disciplinarian) it would be reasonable to VNEs (looking back to indigenous spiritual beliefs) that punishment from God would be right and just.

6.9 An Anglican Receptionist Presentation of the Tiệc Thánh (Holy Meal)

The Anglican congregation CCOH (C1) overseen by the diocese of Singapore teaches standard Anglican doctrine. Many congregants had, however, come from other VNE congregations, and were now being taught Anglican Eucharistic doctrine. Three of the congregants interviewed described distinct differences in the presentation between the

LTT and the Anglican Holy Communion, but still expressed the need for mutual obligation (*ơn*) toward God, as previously taught. Mrs Khanh, (C1-1f), stated

> I think that the LTT is the blood of Jesus poured out for me, his gift for me, to enjoy that. I can't refuse it, or forget it. I receive the LTT from God, that is, the Holy Spirit in me. If the Holy Spirit in me, naturally, then I am saved. When I ask the Holy Spirit, then He answers. So, that means that I am filled with the Holy Spirit. When I forget the LTT then I will slowly become far from God. That is my opinion.

While she sees the LTT as spiritual food (an allusion to Iraeneus' teaching)[84] she also imputes duty into her response, that is, while God will fill her and save her, she indicates her duty to remember: 'I can't refuse it, or forget it' showing mutual obligation (*ơn)* directed toward God Himself. However, this is reciprocal: 'I receive the Holy Spirit, then He answers. If the Holy Spirit is in me, then naturally then I am saved'. God also responds and gift exchange occurs. One is in a reciprocal cycle of mutual obligation.

Mrs Hồng Ân (C1-8f), also a lifelong member of the (HTTL-C3) mother denomination explained: 'I … really like the ceremony of the Holy Communion here, it's more appropriate [more respectful] when one kneels down to receive it'. This also makes one feel that one has adequately reciprocally expressed obligation. While a form of acculturation, the translation model, is used in the Anglican liturgy, more embodied practice enhances feelings of 'giving back' thus, it becomes more meaningful and efficacious. Only one young Christian in the Anglican congregation did not associate the LTT with mutual obligation and the sacrality of remembrance. She had no associations with Christianity before joining the Anglican congregation. She (Hồng Trang C1-10f) explained: 'when I take the Holy Communion, I feel that I have more strength, a strength … as I feel very weak in myself, so every time I take the Holy Communion then in one part I feel very strong [spiritually and physically strong]'. One's need to give expressions of moral obligation, or the sacrality of remembrance is not seen here, but rather something of a reversal, that of the need for spiritual food that supports and nourishes one's inner

[84] See Ireaneus, *Against Heresies*, Book IV, Chapter 38

life. As a new believer who had never had contact with VNE beliefs previous to her joining the Anglican congregation, she saw the Holy Communion (Tiệc Thánh) as a way that God provides spiritual strength for us.

6.10 The LTT Performed as Faith in the 'Here and Now'

The greatest difference between the churches was seen in the independent underground house church. (HTLAS-C7) This congregation, whose members were mainly young college students, had already defied the status quo of performing the LTT only on the first Sunday of the month by doing it at every Sunday evening gathering,[85] as a means of seeking personal, moral, and spiritual victory and power and healing. The young pastor of this church (C7-1m) told me that he studied the Scriptures extensively under the tutelage of numerous Western theologies, and came to believe, that the phrase, 'as often as you take it'[86] meant that it should be done every time believers worship. His autonomy and strong ties with North American Bible teachers meant that he did not feel constrained to follow the *status quo* in dogma and hermeneutics in VNE churches, and was free to select a Christus Victor theology. (Aulén 1931) Typical communion trays filled with mass-produced hosts were carried out before the sermon by servers, and distributed rapidly from person to person, as the congregation stood. The pastor briefly explained its meaning, mainly done within his Eucharistic prayer over the elements, emphasizing that Jesus' death, which now gives freedom from bondage. The trait of remembrance was mentioned, but deliberately de-emphasized; his goal was for partakers to view the LTT as a current faith-event that would aid them in achieving personal victory over sin, Satan, demonic forces, and sickness. Part of his prayer, repeated sentence by sentence, by his congregation as he held the small cup aloft, was a declaration [*công bố*] that 'I am free from sin from my head to my toe, wherever I go and whatever I do I am victorious in the

[85] The church did not meet on Sunday morning.
[86] 1 Corinthians 11:26

Lord, and am free from the power of Satan, sickness and bondage'. (C71m) The entire ceremony was performed in less than ten minutes, as though one was taking a vitamin as a means of boosting one's faith, just as one boost one's nutrition. This pastor deliberately re-defined the LTT not in terms of duty to God as obligation and the sacrality of remembrance or as any form of memorial, but as means of, through faith, a way of achieving spiritual growth and victory in different aspects of one's life. Mutual obligation and the sacrality of remembrance were not evident among these contributors: (C7-1m,2f, 2015, C7-3f, 2015, C7-4m)

6.11 Practising Separation for Holiness as an Acculturation within the LTT

Data indicated that leadership interviewed believed that the taught presentation of the LTT was essential to seeing it as a sacred ceremony. In virtually every instance that questions were presented in regard to how the LTT could be presented, the leader would choose the foreign presentation as taught by their missionary forbears. This in itself may be partly due to the desire to honour those missionary forbears, and the inculcated dispositions toward conformity as part of the Confucian ethos, and an honouring of those above one in status and knowledge. However, this created a difficult setting in VNE churches in integrating in new believers, who all told me that it 'seemed strange 'when they took it and several mentioned that 'one must study this to understand it first'. (C1-1f, C4-3f, C4-4f) and (C1-1f)

In the minds of leaders, data showed that all seven who discussed this issue believed that acculturation is desirable both in terms of belief and ecclesial practice, and perhaps, in their view, the only way forward toward an expression of 'true Christianity'. They seemed to see their own culture, in some regard, as a dead end, tainted, corrupted and deeply in need of replacement, which in their minds, could only come from foreign practices, theologies and hermeneutics of Western Christianity. Pastor and leader

contributors were in lockstep in terms of desiring the implementation of foreign Evangelical/Holiness ecclesial practice and presentation. When asked, 'what could the VNE churches do to make the church and the gospel message seem more familiar for those in Vietnamese culture?' only one younger pastor had suggestions. (C4-15m, 2015)

Those pastors who led congregations (C1, C2, C4, C5, and C7) had in the past received some or all of their pastoral training through the mother denomination, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (HTTL-C3), and had, after founding their own churches, made minor changes. These changes were all taken from other Western presentations. Pastor__(C1-14m), for instance, became an ordained Anglican minister, which could have been seen as controversial. In each case the pastor chose changes tied to distinct Western Evangelical traditions, which required new accultured practice of their members. Pastors saw these changes as unequivocally beneficial. Pastor_(C4-15m) told me that he was, as the senior pastor of an autonomous church, free to develop his own hermeneutic and presentation of the LTT. However, he remained firmly fixed in the belief that the church needed a completely foreign form of presentation. The service in his church was a combination of a HTTL hermeneutic and Wesleyan doctrines as a fluid presentation of both. However, he had considered putting in an altar rail in order for the congregation to kneel, in an effort to create a deeper sense of reverence, adding to the separation for holiness. All pastors in this study were unequivocal in their commitment to Western ecclesial forms and doctrine.

Average VNE members also showed a desire or felt the need to accept some forms of acculturation into their lives when becoming Christians. Several cited instances in their personal lives of seeking acculturation in some form that aided in their conversion. Mrs Khanh, (C1-1f) had begun studying the Bible in English, which eventually led to her conversion. As Mrs Lạc (C2-1f) began to really believe in God, she prayed for, then subsequently met, a foreign Christian and married him. Both of these female contributors

saw these events as signs that God was working in their lives, thus, their acceptance of acculturated forms in church were viewed as good and necessary.

I posit that leaders actually prefer that the LTT remain foreign looking, as this aids in elevating it to a position higher than other local rituals.[87] Pastors (C2-5m), (C4-1m, C4-15m C4-16m, C1-14) all saw non-believers as simple and superstitious, and lacking in understanding about God. Since most of Vietnamese society does not worship the God of Christianity (Đức Chúa Trời) they feel justified in using purely foreign ecclesiological presentations in their churches, which were even necessary to lift them up into spiritual and cultural practices that were untainted by idolatry and superstition. Pastor__ (C3-7m) stated explicitly, in regard to AV rites:

> The church [VNE churches] is changing that concept in their hearts, proving that they [VNEs] are not unfilial, [*bất hiếu*] but that this is the true form of filial behavior [*hiếu*], which is to take care of your parents while they are living, and be obedient to them. When your parents die, if you worship [*cúng*] them, what is there to enjoy [what is beneficial?] The church is trying to change this viewpoint in society.

Since, for a VNE to participate in rituals such as baptism and the LTT, this 'new understanding' is required, the LTT becomes a very exclusive ritual open only to those who can accept this new conceptual construct. A combination of Holiness thought, with its de-emphasis on ritual, combined with the VNE fear or idolatrous action through objects in ritual combined to form a ritual applied with little or no 'self-theologizing'. The signifiers of bread and juice functionally stress the dematerialization taught to VNEs, as a defensive hedge against possible re-materialization, that of transubstantiation, or that the elements might contain magical properties. Kuiper explains Keane's analysis of missionary work among the Sumba:

> The missionaries would tolerate the limited manipulation of signifiers (water, bread, grape juice) as long as it was understood that these were relatively arbitrary vehicles for an unseen, transcendent signified. In the process, converts were not only joining a religious practice, they were learning to participate in a semiotic ideology of dematerialization (2008:1135)

The statement above may be applied to the presentation of the LTT among VNE

[87] For example, Buddhist, indigenous, *lên đông* (mediumship) rituals, worship of various Vietnamese saints, Roman Catholic practices, and ancestral veneration itself.

churches. Partly through the implicit teaching regarding dematerialization, purification is achieved as a way toward a belief in the unseen, holy, and transcendent. In this way, as well, the trait of 'separation to holiness 'emerged and was taught extensively in VNE churches, partly out of fear, and partly out of the need to fulfil all duties to God to show oneself worthy, as a moral expression of *ơn* seen in expressions of filiality in the LDG.

6.12 Fear of Embodied Ritual in VNE Churches and Present Changes

VNE performance of the LTT was heavily influenced by a fear of embodied ritual by leadership, who felt constrained to never go outside the boundaries of language-based ritual forms for fear of these being misinterpreted as idolatrous. Minimalization of ritual is seen as evidence of the authenticity of the LTT. A fear of bodily action also reflects the need for 'purification' and the fear of materiality (with objects such as incense, or candles) being used in those rituals. The five researched churches that were influenced by the (HTTL-C3) ethos, in terms of minimalization of ritual presentation, were also very exclusive in the use of ritual objects. None are allowed except the table on which are put the Bible, and at brief times, the elements, the individual cups, and the communion hosts (which are identical to those used in Roman Catholic churches). Contributor Pastor (C4-16m, 2015), from Methodist congregation (HTGL-C4) was very careful to tell me that the communion table, 'was just a table [*cái bà*n] to put things on 'and to carefully separate it from the meaning associated with the Vietnamese word for altar [*bàn thờ*] on which, he believes, food and other objects are sacrificed to ancestors and other spirit beings. The (HTGL-C4) service uses no candles or vestments, although the pastor does occasionally wear a clerical collar. The use of objects beyond a Bible and a cross could be seen as idolatrous. Candles, a chalice, holy water, oil, special garb for ministers, and so on, were not accepted. However, in the (HTTL-C3) denomination, the all-male team wear dark suits, in lieu of other religious clothing; this also functions ritually, and adds a feeling of solemnity and seriousness to the performance of the LTT.

All of these practices strongly reflect the holiness-pietist reactions to church practices seen as nominalized in the West and smacking of dead tradition; thus, it is clear that VNEs have remained faithful to the hermeneutic drawn from missionaries 'teachings. However, congregations (C1, C3, C4, C6) have been gradually re-ritualizing the LTT ceremony, done with the intention of making the ritual seem more efficacious. White robes are worn by deacons/ministers during the performance of the LTT in the Methodist (HTGL-C4) congregation. These forms are strictly within non-offensive categories, and centre around language-based ritual form, such as Scripture texts done with banners, altar cloths, a special LTT hymn, (Hymn #400), prayers, sermons and the reading of Scripture. Thus, the need to keep oneself pure of anything smacking of idolatry (particularly anything which would appear as Roman Catholic forms of worship) is a central factor in the performance and presentation of the LTT. The Anglican priest wore a simple white robe (CCOH-C1) and of course, a chalice and candles are used as means of more embodied ritual presentation. This does not seem disturbing to the congregants, but visiting contributor Mai (C3-1f) told me that she did not want to partake of the Holy Communion in this church as 'it felt Catholic'. In (C6-IHCKC) house church, the leader (Đen, C6-2m) who performed the LTT, had, without any external instruction, begun wearing a traditional Cambodian scarf (reminiscent of the ecclesial stole seen in Catholic and Anglican churches) that is put on and worn only during the actual LTT ceremony. Mr Đen, whether instinctively, or as an overt decision, saw that adding non-offensive ritual objects could add meaning and efficacy to the performance of the LTT. It also had the added component of increasing the sense of an imposed separation from the profane that defined presentations of six out of seven of the congregations studied.

The conformity to a severely minimalized form of ritual, has, over four generations, slowly eroded, for even in the mother denomination (HTTL-C3), churches, text and oral forms within the LTT ritual have become more intricate. These newly

formed congregations/denominations were still permeated by the ethos and hermeneutics of the (HTTL-C3) mother denomination, but are beginning to embrace more complex presentation of ritual to strengthen efficacy. They did not improvise by using any familiar forms, (except in the case of the C6-IHCKC house church, who used the Cambodian scarf as a stole) but rather embraced richer and more extensive ecclesial ritual which required appropriating and using higher levels of non-offensive presentation, versus the de-culturated forms taught them by original missionaries.

6.13 The Sacrality of Remembrance as Looking to the Source

Even among VNEs who were born into the church community, the expression of a filial *habitus* as one's duty to God (*ơn*) appropriated anamnesis as the trait of the sacrality of remembrance, if presentation and hermeneutics described in these Chapters were in place, and was most pronounced in the mother denomination, (HTTL-C3). The inculcation of the dispositions of *ơn* and in some cases, *biết ơn* (C4-16m) (C4-17f) as mutual obligation to thanksgiving was seen in the practice of the LTT. This formed an underlying epistemology, though overlaid with a Holiness hermeneutic of separation for holiness.

Mr Bữu (C1-9m), directly connected the indigenous sacrality of remembrance to God, as source, stating: 'I think that He is the source that is given to us … When I participate in the LTT here I feel very close to God'. He mentions both the 'source', *cái nguồn* (referring to a Vietnamese proverb is used to describe filiality).[88] The filial *habitus* inculcating the sacrality of remembrance is directed toward Jesus' Himself in remembrance of His death. Despite his roots in the mother denomination of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam, (HTTL-C3) and his current Anglican affiliation, he continues to embody this filial *habitus*.

Changes in the dispositions of filial duty do not change after conversion, and in

[88] This proverb '*nhớ về nguồn'*, 'remember' or 'look to the source' is discussed in terms of filiality in Chapter Three.

many cases are expressed in the ritual of the LTT, as the partaker defaults back to an inculcated disposition. The accepted Evangelical ritual presentation using abstract metaphors and severely minimalized embodied ritual practice must be 'studied' to be understood and this discouraged efficacy. The LTT must be seen as a ritual within the cycle of mutual obligation (*ơn* and *biết ơn*) otherwise it is a holy, separated, but mysterious ritual, which one fears, and may be seen as 'mechanical' or 'rote' in expression. In many cases, little sense of benefit is imparted, or it is misunderstood by the partaker. (Leader__C8-1m) One contributor, responding in English said, 'you must qualify for that', that is, is, be worthy of carrying out this duty, but he saw no elements of mutual gratitude (*biết ơn*) expressed. (Truong, C8-4m) This statement shows how difficult it is to get past the foreign trait of separation, and the need for re-indoctrination each month before partaking of it. However, if the LTT includes the VN trait of *ơn,* and *biết ơn,* and appropriates *anamnesis* as the understanding of the sacrality of remembrance, the memorialization of death becomes more precious, for the participant draws from the trait 'remembering the source'.

How should the separation for holiness be classified in terms of *habitus*? The rigid boundaries between the sacred and the profane are not strongly indicated in the LDG as part of a Vietnamese cosmology, but are subtle and diffused in nature. While Vietnamese society recognizes categories of the sacred and profane in religious practice in Buddhism in terms of gender, temple status and altar care, and may have awareness of this separation in Roman Catholic practices (Trang, C1-5f), these are not deeply entrenched in indigenous spiritual practice. Gift exchange is the means of offsetting judgment in Taoist practice (as to the Mother goddesses, for example) as well as in Buddhist practice, which are often focused on exchange of material goods. Symbolic exchange is less practiced. The boundaries of separation of the sacred and the profane are artificially imposed through the teaching of Western Evangelical theologies. New converts to VNE churches

may quickly discern that sacredness implies a separation, seen in the performance of the LTT. However, this imposition is not well appropriated or understood by the average VNE, but rather the continuance of the enculturated trait of mutual obligation is expressed as part of the filial disposition.

This is significantly different from the practice of the LDG, one so enculturated into Vietnamese societal lifestyle as to seem completely natural, both a familial and communal event, set off slightly by its sacramental quality. Note the enormous gap between the two rituals: the efficacious enculturated rituals of AV rites are deeply tied to one's Vietnamese collective place with an implicit sacramentality in the natural rhythms of life. It seems such an essential expression of Vietnamese-ness as to make Đạng remark:

> The religious form of this belief may appear to be becoming fainter but, in fact, it is deep-seated and deep-rooted in the people, representing a fine custom in the nation, imbued with a sense of duty. As the saying goes, "Drink water, remembering the spring". (Dang Van Nghiem 1995:352)

He is speaking here of the filial *habitus* which extends beyond family and functions as the central tenet and foundation of life in indigenous rituals.

The potential for enculturation, as VNEs drawn from their indigenous sacramentality of remembrance inculcated dispositions and at least within the VNE community, show evidence of an inchoate Christian enculturation. The potential for development of local theology exists within the field of VNE ecclesiology, if there is openness to simple changes in presentation of the LTT to one more accessible to a Vietnamese filial *habitus* that 'looks to the source'.

Thus, while all VNEs give lip service to the highly elevated stance of the LTT, and treat it with kid gloves, due to the fear of abuse and God's judgment they continue to perform it as a duty to God as moral obligation (*ơn*) implicitly, but it is 'locked in' to a non-enculturated box, seen as a mysterious event, in which limited understanding of how God's grace is received. The understanding of unconditional *eucharistia* is in many cases, absent, as the trait of the separation for holiness, as a solemn and individualistic

presentation in a reified Evangelical/Holiness form of ritual obscures it. It does not aid VNEs in developing inculturation keys which would bridge to enculturated cultural traits. Yet, in spite of this presentation, they have appropriated anamnesis as filial mutual obligation, *ơn*, and the sacrality of remembrance, believing that this to be what Jesus commanded, and follow this faithfully.

6.14 Is Something Missing?

Contributors mentioned the element of thanksgiving peripherally; the traits of mutual obligation, inclusive of sacred remembrance were of prime importance. However, four contributors, (C5-1f, C2-6m) including two pastors, (C4-16m, C4-17f) specifically used the term, *biết ơn,* which as mentioned, means to understand that *ơn*, must be reciprocated, or to show thanks. It is both performative and in the affective domain, that is, there is a sense of duty, as well as desire, to thank those who have given one life. Duty, however is the predominant trait within its essential meaning. The form of the enactment of the LTT ritual as an act of worship is also a powerful expression of filiality, in fulfilment of *ơn* and *biết ơn*, as a response to Jesus' command: 'Do this in remembrance of me'. Seen from the perspective of these embedded dispositions of filiality, mutual obligation is incurred. While this is an act of duty, for God has given His son for us, and we must fulfill that duty, to respond to what He has commanded of us, sacred remembrance. In this response as one's duty of obligation to God, the sacrality of remembrance also clearly comes into play. To remember Jesus' death is not only carried out as a filial duty as *biết ơn,* it also becomes a sacred act of remembrance.

It is significant that the original term, 'the Eucharist', taken from *eucharistia*, simply means, 'give thanks'. A partial definition of the Eucharist in the BEM document is as follows:

> The Eucharist, which always includes both word and sacrament, is a proclamation and a celebration of the work of God. It is the great thanksgiving to the Father for everything accomplished in creation, redemption and sanctification, for everything accomplished by God now in the Church and in the world in spite of the sins of human beings, for everything that God will accomplish in bringing the Kingdom

> to fulfilment. Thus, the Eucharist is the benediction (*berakah*) by which the Church expresses its thankfulness for all God's benefits. (World Council of Churches 1982:8-13)

This full expression of thanksgiving was absent many VNE responses, which focused almost exclusively on *anamnesis* as a sacrality of remembrance through the work of atonement through filial habituations of one's mutual obligation.

The forms of thanksgiving described also inculcated mutual obligation, in fulfilment of *biết ơn*, (Pastor __C4-16m) among some contributors, which is also understood as an obligation to give back, and in the case of the LTT, is transferred (appropriated) directly toward God the Father, the parent of every human. Chih concurs that filiality as thanksgiving is ultimately focused back to God: 'Gratitude toward one's parents is an attitude of thanksgiving toward God as the ultimate source of life'. (Chih 1981:366) When the pastor uses the expression, *Chung con tạ ơn Chúa,* there is collective response of 'thanksgiving for being in a place of favour', and the LTT may be a collective way of offering thanksgiving in the cycle of mutual obligation for a debt which is so vast it cannot be repaid. Contributor Trang (VKC-1f) told me, '*ơn* also includes, a little bit, the meaning of thanksgiving'. In the LTT *ơn* is certainly more focused on fulfilling one's duty of the sacrality of remembrance of Jesus' death, a form of gift exchange (though Christian doctrine teaches that there is nothing that we, as humans have as an equivalent exchange) than a free expression of gratitude for what 'You did for me/us'. Thanksgiving expressed was offering thanks for Jesus 'death for oneself and as one fulfils one's duties, one feels relieved of a burden, as one remembers 'one's commitment to be obedient to God'. (Trang, C5-1f, 2019)

6.15 Conclusion

It is evident that the accepted original form of the presentation of the LTT does nothing to promote inculturation, (in its highly reified presentation), and is actually a barrier to enculturation. While the LDG ritual expresses collective Vietnamese *habitus* through

ritual, the LTT, instead of being a Christocentric-Vietnamese presentation which expresses thanksgiving to God the Father, it remains an exclusive, separate ritual which is unappropriated by the average VNE. A presentation done with severely limited materiality needs to be appropriated as an acculturated form, and an abstract symbolism, thus, is seen as elevated, holy and, a 'mystery', and must be studied to be understood. (C4-3f, C4-4f, C1-1f) Yet, through the epistemological lens of *habitus*, research shows that the VNEs have also through their enculturated filial dispositions filled in the spaces with relevant meanings that are culturally appropriate. The enculturated traits of duty as part of the filial *habitus*, and the sacred duty to remember are inculcated into the LTT ritual among VNEs, implicitly, if not in presentation. Laid on top of these dispositions is an imposed form of sacredness and separation from foreign Western theological indoctrinations in the teaching of the LTT in VNE communities.

Are these filial responses appropriate? I would have to say, unequivocally, yes, not only appropriate, but are ones that express an inchoate Christian enculturation, and if understood, allow at least the possibility of the beginning step for local theology. Scholar KS Nguyen (2017) has noticed this:

> Ontologically the Vietnamese cannot understand why Vietnamese evangelicals celebrate the death of Jesus (as in the Lord's Supper) in their regular worship but do not do so with their own ancestors. Even when argued that the Lord's Supper is just a memorial ("in remembrance of Jesus") the sacrament should be an act of worship, not just merely remembering His death. Biblically speaking, Jesus Christ is the Way (God) and Jesus Christ is God with us, then such celebration is considered as an act of worship of the One True God, or at least a part of Christian worship for centuries in the Christian church. The Apostle Paul also argued, "but in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died" ! (1 Cor. 15:20, NRSV). Then would the Lord's Supper be seen as an act of veneration of Jesus Christ in Christian worship? (282) [sic]

In fact, many VNEs do see the LTT as the veneration/worship of Jesus Christ who died for them; this ritual act, for many, may be seen as a filial one.

Is there an understanding of unconditional grace contained in this VNE inhabituation (and the Eucharist as a free and unrestrained act of thanks for Jesus 'act of atonement) seen from the taught Evangelical hermeneutic of 'unmerited favor'? Doctrine stressing God's free gift of salvation is clearly seen in explicit evangelistic activity and

preaching. (Hội Thánh Tin Lành, 2018) However, in ecclesial practice, mutual obligation as *ơn* and *biết ơn* drawn from the filial disposition (as in the LTT) are seen. The understanding of and implications of grace with a hermeneutic of unmerited favour is something that VNE communities, again, must wrestle with, as they gradually develop authentic Vietnamese formal theologies. VNE communities, in spite of decades of Western theology, are not mirror images of Western Evangelical communities, despite their appearance. The underlying disposition of a filial *habitus* continues to show itself.

It may be possible for VNEs to develop an understanding and a hermeneutic that explicitly promotes these filial dispositions if enlarged into a fuller and richer local theology, as Vietnamese reflect on these habituations. They may be able, through the overt appropriation of the traits of *ơn, biết ơn*, and 'looking to the source', innovate new embodied rituals which express a truly Christocentric Vietnamese-ness, and the teaching of new hermeneutics may reflect a more creational theological approach, (versus a displacement model discussed previously in Chapter Five), giving opening to the penetration of new local theologies.

Chapter Seven

Historical Background of the Eucharistic Event and Its Impact Upon Vietnamese Evangelicalism

7.1 Introduction

An assessment of the long history of Eucharistic[89] practices in Western orthodoxy and orthopraxy is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, a brief explanation is needed in order to understand the tradition that VNE churches inherited and that which has been faithfully practised among them for just over 100 years. The Eucharist, of course has seen many epistemological changes from many perspectives: form, content, theology and presentation not excluded. It has seen extreme alterations in orthodoxy and orthopraxy, and been the cause of much conflict, violence, and even martyrdom within Christendom. In particular, this research examines the rich diversity in terms of improvisation and innovation seen in the Eucharistic ritual in various early Christian communities, showing evidence of enculturation, that in some places gave rise to the birth of local theologies within the Eucharistic event.

A reified form of Eucharistic practice (O'Loughlin 2009; 2014) was unintentionally transmitted to Vietnamese Christians at the beginning of the twentieth century, one understood by missionaries from within a Holiness tradition, and which was rooted in the theological stance of AB Simpson, the founder of the C & MA mission agency. Within the limited amount of textual evidence available, present VNE orthopraxy will be discussed in light of the historical context of the Holiness movement of the early twentieth century in an attempt at understanding the development of VNE Eucharistic practices, and whether these disable or enable development of local theology through enculturated dispositions. Reifications which have disabled development of local theology as

[89] The term 'Eucharist' is used as the accepted, universal, academic term, while 'LTT' is the VNE interpretation of the term within their own context.

displacements (O'Loughlin, 2015:191-196) within the Eucharistic event will be examined. These displacements produced, both in form, doctrine and presentation of a ritual so symbolized as to be hardly recognizable if compared with early liturgical forms and presentations. McGowan decries the abstractions and symbolic actions of the Eucharistic event by contrasting it with earlier forms:

> Most Christian writings from the second century on suggest that the power and character of the Eucharistic food were upheld with startling realism. There is no hint that they were merely signs to assist with the remembrance of an idea or understanding of a doctrine, or that their reality depended on the attitude of the recipient. On the other hand, the means of Jesus' presence in the food or in the act of sharing was not defined by any ancient writer in metaphysical terms like those of medieval theology. (McGowan 2014:47)

VNEs inherited a reified form typical in Holiness settings, an abstract, symbolic event carefully set apart from the profane. These displacements which gradually replaced enculturated traits are discussed.

7.2 The Eucharist is a Ritual

In this research, the understanding of the Eucharist as a ritual is of consequence, for it is here that contextual understanding can be developed in cross-cultural settings, such as among Vietnamese Evangelicals. It is necessary for the Eucharist to be studied as a ritual, for it was, in fact, begun by Jesus as a domestic ritual and a communal meal. Meals, first and foremost, contain ritual components. (Douglas 1972) The gospel narratives, as well as Paul's description in 1 Corinthians 11 all indicate the ritual components of the event. Viewing the Eucharist within the framework of a ritual allows a truer picture of what Jesus Himself did at the Last Supper and what early Christian communities did in response to the narratives they received regarding Jesus.

Understanding the Eucharistic event as practiced by VNEs can only be understood by examining what actual people engage in when they practice it. As O'Loughlin states, 'we humans – because we are symbol using animals – are continually engaged in ritual'. (O'Loughlin, 2015:11) Reading the gospel narratives, one is immediately struck with the ritual (albeit a simple one) being described through the actions of Jesus. The most likely

explanation for this is that Jesus was following common traditions indicated for the Passover meal of His time. (Jeremias 1966; Bradshaw 200915-16)

The communal ritual of the Eucharist seen in all branches of Christendom constitutes a ritual encompassing multivalent meanings: remembrance, (*anamnesi*s), community inclusion, (the unity of the body of Christ, or *koinonia*) sharing in His death and resurrection, praise and thanksgiving toward the Father, the Paschal Supper, a sacrificial dedication of oneself to God, the unbloody sacrifice of Christ performed in each mass, (Roman Catholic practice previous to Vatican II), and the *eschaton*, a foretelling of the future Messianic banquet to be celebrated at Christ's return. All of these facets have been, or are currently seen within the universal church in various scenarios and at various times.

Eucharistic practice, in form and presentation, including *anaphoras*, prayers of invocation, consecration and blessing, along with embodied ritual (bodily action) are in fact, ritual. To perform or participate in the Eucharistic event has been seen, from the beginning, established as a ritual performed by Jesus as He spoke over the bread and wine, thus, it was an event 'set apart' from the normalcy of life. While there is great diversity in the Church in carrying this out, it is always carried out in some ritual form, whether as sacrament, a sacrifice, an ordinance, a sacramental supper, a sacred rite, a memorial, or some combination of these.

Humans seek meaning both in use of symbol/s which are inherently part of ritual; the created ritual produces lasting meaning. (Bradshaw 2009; Douglas 1973; Geertz 1971; Turner 1967) These rituals, within the broader scheme of life, lifestyle, culture and worldview, to some extent, allow the development of collective identity (place) in terms of place, family, community and the world at large, as well as provide ontological connections into the world beyond this one. (Bell 2009:vi) The Eucharistic event is meant to do just this: connect the members of Christ's body, both to one another, and to God in

a special encounter. It is a ritual intended to express and transmit ontological realities to the participants. For some, it may be seen as the heart of both orthodoxy and orthopraxy, and while this may be true in some times and in some places (Ford 1999), for many, the reverse is actually true, particularly in modern and post-modern Western culture: the event has come to be seen as something so peripheral in terms of essential Christian orthopraxy as to be very easily eliminated or forgotten. VNEs inherited a reified form of Eucharistic practice that had, due to Holiness doctrine and ethos, been highly simplified, as missionaries attempted 'de-culturate it' (strip it down to its barest form so that it could be easily understood and easily implemented). The descriptions of the LTT, were for example, 'an object lesson of Jesus' death', (MC-3 Irwin, 2015) as a statement of Jesus' work of redemption on the cross. The need for ritual emerged, however over the next four generations as VNEs began to fill in the blanks with meaning from their own cultural dispositions of filiality, adhering with great care to the outward form, are gradually in some settings, to elaborate upon the ritual form and presentation in order to achieve a heightened sense of holiness and separation from an environment tainted by idol worship, sin and self.

7.3 The 'True Eucharist': Seeking the Holy Grail?

Before discussing the reifications of the Eucharist event, there must be an attempt to examine earliest original forms of Eucharist, described in ancient documents, in order to give as able a picture as is possible of what Jesus meant He presided over his last supper with his disciples. What did the statements, 'This is my body … this is my blood … do this in remembrance of Me', mean in word and action in the first three centuries after the birth of Christianity? When and how did the Eucharist become such a highly symbolized, and abstract ritual form that the obvious, intended meanings were lost? Instead of being a domestic, communal, ritual meal, the meaning of which might have allowed transmutative enculturation within cultural contexts, it became an event in which included

physical elements purporting to be 'food' which could hardly be identified as such; was not done in a domestic setting; could not be performed without a priest; enforced the sacred (versus the profane) to such a degree that participants feared to partake, and, was seen as a mysterious event which could perhaps, not really be understood by human beings. This is not the picture in the gospel narratives, in which Jesus chose, from Semitic imagery, inherently powerful ritual components which could easily be imitated and passed on, and, it can be argued, used imagery which would have been recognizable in diverse cultural settings, such as a Vietnamese one (for example, a communal memorial feast).

Within liturgical settings, immense importance has been attached to the seemingly essential original institution narratives. What did the original Eucharist look like? Numerous scholars spent vast amounts of time and energy in research seeking this original Eucharistic narrative, but to no avail.[90] All efforts by scholars, from numerous ancient texts, archaeological inscriptions, and archaeological remains to piece this together have been unsuccessful. (McGowan 2004; Jeremias 1966; Bradshaw 2009; Cullmann & Leenhardt 2004) The disappointing conclusion for scholarship was that there was no original Eucharistic event passed down from generation to generation. Early churches had no central institution narratives and no *anaphoras* used in liturgical prayers. Various cultures applied, merged, formed, adapted, assimilated, improvised, and at times, innovated within their worldviews, *habitus*, and cultural norms. O'Loughlin notes

> The lack of uniformity of practice and consistency in teaching in the earliest churches has been the bane of later Christian discourse for centuries where those two qualities were not only highly valued culturally and theologically but indeed *were assumed to have been present in the originating moment* (O'Loughlin, 2015:8) [sic].

In fact, such cultural traits were not present in these early settings in new Christian communities.

[90] Gregory Dix, an Anglican scholar, through extensive research, pieced together what he thought was the earliest form but even he admits that there were many modifications, from what he deemed the 'original' (Dix 1945).

Viewing these historical documents through an anthropological lens allows a more appropriate means of understanding the development of the Eucharist: as the gospel spread unevenly through the ancient Mediterranean world across Asia Minor, and into Europe. Diverse cultural practices, as part of the specific cultural dispositions in play, allowed diverse expressions of the Eucharistic meal/rite as it developed in different settings. In each setting unique differences emerged: ancient documents show that these prayers, *anaphoras* and rituals were improvisations or innovations which distinguished them from the non-Christian spiritual practices and beliefs surrounding them.

In these areas, either, or both, Jewish and Gentile backgrounds were in play. Before centralized and standardized forms were implemented through the institutionalized Roman church in 'top down' fashion; communities simply drew from their own cultural forms and backgrounds, learned of New Testament teaching (often only through oral transmission), and implemented creative improvisations. Eucharistic prayers, (without the institution narratives) were often improvised. (Bouley 1981:97) Evidence supports the fact that beginning in the second and extending into the fourth century, Eucharistic *anaphoras* were often extemporized, but built upon previous tradition of the local leader, apostle, prophet or priest. (Bouley 1981:84-85) These were often later frowned upon due to threats of heresy, and were gradually standardized. After much time, effort and scholarship investment, what has emerged is a rather 'patchwork quilt' of diverse ritual practices of the Eucharist from the late first through the early fourth century. Some scholars have questioned whether the Last Supper actually took place, (Bradshaw 2009; Alikin 2010) or was a construction placed in Scripture at a later date. Other scholars believe that the gospel narrative/s were founded in historical fact; and that these narratives, passed on, provided the basis for understanding the Last Supper narrative, and for the emergence of numerous and diverse Eucharistic practices to emerge. These changed and re-shaped themselves over the first three centuries. No originating

point of liturgical forms and *anaphoras* can be identified. Bradshaw believes that there were 'parallel forms' of ecclesial development and practice, as evidenced from very early documents such as the *Didache* (seemingly emerging from Jewish traditions and practice), the Apostolic Tradition, (segments of which pre-date the fourth century) and various early church fathers (including the writings of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Ignatius, Tertullian, and Cyprius). He states, 'there does exist evidence that would lend some support to this notion of several parallel forms of Christian ritual meals that only gradually coalesced into the pattern that we recognize as the normal Eucharist', and stresses that

> Modern New Testament scholarship tends to view nascent Christianity as an essentially pluriform movement with diverse theologies and diverse practices. Against such a background, therefore the expectation of variety in Christian liturgical custom would seem more probable than that of uniformity. (2004: viii-ix)

His scholarship, as well as that following, lends support to the improvisational approaches to the Eucharistic event drawn from and developed separately in culturally specific locations.

7.3.1 The Innovation of Jesus: Enculturation at His Last Supper

O'Loughlin identifies a significant incident within each gospel narrative, as well as the narrative reiterated by Paul. Jesus passes around one cup to the disciples with whom He shares the Last Supper. This was a unique innovation specifically created by Jesus, for He deliberately wanted His disciples to share one loaf and cup. O'Loughlin states

> There was no equivalent to it in any known Jewish practice. Making the sharing of a cup part of one's table manners is confined exclusively to the followers of Jesus. Moreover, that Jesus' followers considered it to be a deliberate and significant ritual is seen in that they located it, and remembered it, explicitly in relation to Jesus' own action and wishes. This is already evident in Paul when he wrote to the Corinthians assuming there is a single cup (10:16) and that they all drink 'the cup of the Lord' (11:27); and that this is a practice 'received from the Lord' (11:23). This practice is unique to the churches. (2015:6)

Drinking from the same cup was a statement of oneness with Jesus, both in His life and his death. It implied a covenantal vow of complete commitment to Him and to one another. This innovation has been lost in many branches of Christendom for various

reasons, though a few still preserve the practice. Sharing one cup in an intimate, domestic ritual had deep and powerful connotations to His disciples. Jesus, drawing from the common Jewish ritual of *hagaddah* (Passover) of the time, gives the ritual a unique 'twist' expressing the unique and radically new truth emerging from His death and resurrection as the New Covenant. (Mark 14:24)

7.3.2 Improvisation and Innovation in Early Christian Eucharists

The creation and development of the Eucharistic meal/rite emerged within various Mediterranean, Egyptian and Asia Minor cultures through local Christians relying upon common cultural forms of communal gathering, often relying upon Jewish prayer structures. Gentile Christian communities drew upon Hellenistic structures and cultural forms. (Alikin 2010) The absence of standardized institution narratives can be seen in the instructions for Eucharistic practice in the *Didache*. It is possible that these were didactic in nature: learned as part of a catechism among other teachings that included portions of Scripture quotations, and simply understood, but not spoken, during the Eucharistic meal/rite. (Bradshaw 2004:23)

Many of these Gentile communities, particularly within Palestine, seemed to have access to common Jewish prayer texts (and may have been some of the 'God-fearers 'who attended synagogues in Palestine and in the Diaspora). The stories and accounts of the Last Supper and Passion were disseminated through itinerant teachers, apostles and prophets (indicated in the New Testament and the *Didache)* but the Supper (as Paul calls it in 1 Corinthians) was without institution narratives; communities had no models to observe for the performance of the Eucharistic rite and how it should be enacted. This leads one to believe that the means for the transmission of the presentation of the Eucharistic meal/rite emerged from diverse cultural pre-Christian enculturated practices and was deliberately modified through Christian improvisations in Jewish and Gentile settings. Diverse ritual forms described below indicate distinctly Christian practices,

however, none of these were 'created from scratch', but, rather modified from existing ritual form. (Bouley 1981:97-8) The historical evidence afforded to us provides evidence of these communities doing local theology in individual cross-cultural settings across the ancient world.

7.3.3 The Eucharistic Event in 1 Corinthians 11 as Described by the Apostle Paul

Some cultural context can be gleaned from Paul's account of the event the first Christian Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 11. He is apparently very accepting of their structural formation of the Lord's Supper, done in Hellenistic fashion. In fact, the term Paul uses for supper (δεῖπνον) is the common one used in Greek banquets. (McGowan 2015:505) The initial structure of the Supper, sometimes described as an agape feast,[91] scholars believe, followed common Hellenistic practices of *symposium*, a bi-part meeting beginning with the meal, (offered to a particular deity) followed by philosophical discussion, speeches, and drinking of wine, according to protocols in Greco-Roman culture. In a Christian setting, the feast would be followed by teachings, singing, conversation, the drinking of wine, speeches, or the manifestation of charismatic gifts. Alikin states, 'The bipartite agenda of the Christian gathering, consisting of a supper and an ensuing meeting shows that it was the Christian actualization of a generally Hellenistic practice'. She continues, 'the periodical supper held by voluntary associations was a generally Hellenistic practice', and 'In this respect pagans and Jews shared the same cultural tradition'. (2010:37) Her evidence is well attested and affirmed by Bradshaw's extensive scholarship. (Bradshaw 1992, 2004, 2009)

[91] Scholars have never established with certainty whether all *agape* feasts always contained a Eucharistic rite of some type in Gentile communities. Some early gatherings were called *agape* and included the Eucharist as part of the feast, the ritual separation simply being done as blessings over the bread and wine (or water). However, *agape* feasts very soon began to include specific ritual activity centring on the bread and wine, initialling its 'set apartness'. Agape feasts eventually came to signify charity meals for the poorer in the community, and the Eucharist became a separate, ritualized action only involving bread and wine (or water), and the elements which quickly came to be seen as efficacious, along with prayers of invocation, blessing thanksgiving and offering.

Paul shows no interest in and does nothing to force the Corinthians into standardized Jewish protocols for ritual, whether *haggadah* (Passover ritual prayers) or *berakoth* (Jewish table prayers). In fact, Paul's only concern is pointed toward class divisions among the rich and the poor, and unloving, discriminatory actions resulting from this. He reminds them what the Lord's Supper truly means. Paul does not define or require a standardized Jewish ritual form of the Supper, his teachings (1Cor. 11:23-26), simply re-iterating and echoing Luke's narrative of the Last Supper. This opens an avenue for the establishment for a ritual form of the Eucharistic event. He elevates the event by his statements that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον) and that he had 'received it from the Lord'. (vs.23) He denounced class separation as unloving behaviour, but actively accepted their Hellenistic expressions of the supper, including using their common vocabulary and paves the way for Christian enculturated presentations, leaving the specific establishment of the ritual and how it is done to the Corinthians themselves.

7.3.4 The Didache: Innovation and Enculturation

The prayers of the *Didache* focused on blessing, praise and thanksgiving, at which times offerings of bread were included. These blessings did not allude to the bread and wine being the 'body and blood 'of Jesus. This first century document is thought to be of Jewish-Christian origin; thus, the prayers came from common Jewish table prayers, *(berakoth*) but were certainly adapted for specific Christian practice. It is quite likely that these Jewish-Christian communities also structured their Eucharistic event/meal around a Hellenistic symposia cultural form common in Hellenistic Palestine.

Alikin, referring to Harnack's scholarship, states, 'another interpretation suggests that the *Didache* reflects an early form of the Eucharist in which references to the Jesus' death or the Last Supper were still lacking'. (2010:109) These communities used and improvised traditional Jewish ritual form and prayers. Many, or perhaps, all of these early

Eucharists leaders, hosts, deacons, or president (*presteo*) who oversaw the supper did not consider using the words of Jesus to recite over the elements. It seems to have never occurred to them to do this, and most had little or no access to texts which later formed the New Testament. Bouley states 'We believe that the *Didachist* describes the evening Eucharistic meal as it was celebrated in very early churches which were predominantly Jewish-Christian'. He sees the Eucharistic ritual structured in this way:

> The blessing of [chapter] 9.2 was recited over a preliminary text. Then before the meal, the blessing over the bread was prayed. The meal followed. At its conclusion the triple blessing prayer of chapter 10 was recited, presumably over the final cup. (1981:97)

He also cites Talley's work as evidence that 'their Christianisation is … profound'. (97).

Bouley continues:

> The *Didachist* provides these prayers for the sake of those who preside at the meal and are disinclined to pray freely in their own words perhaps because they felt unqualified or were lacking in the prophetic spirit…the prayers of the *Didache* make it clear that the patterns of Christian Eucharistic prayer derive from Judaism and that even at a very early date such patterns existed and had begun the process of being transformed in a specifically Christian manner. (97)

New Christian innovations (allowing for potential enculturation) were seen, in the Eucharistic event. A Christian president (*presteo)* or, possibly a travelling apostle or prophet was honoured to preside over the event. (Alikin 2010; Bradshaw 2004) Whether these communities were led by an itinerant apostles, prophets and teachers, no one seemed concerned in these early settings to force young churches to use specific or memorized texts, or enforced certain forms of prayers. These early Christians chose, modified and transformed the Jewish forms of *hagaddah* and *berakoth* into Christian ones. Sadly, many of these enculturated forms were lost in later Christian antiquity.

7.3.5 Other Early Eucharists

Bradshaw believes that 'the meal in the *Didache* simply reflects one of a number of different types of meals that existed side-by-side in Christianity, each representing the local practice of a particular community or group of communities'. (Bradshaw 2004:32) These usually included bread and a cup, but even these were subject to improvisation. Bradshaw delineates three possible sequences in nascent Eucharistic ritual practice: the

use of bread only (no cup), the use of water instead of wine (bread-water) (McGowan 1999), a cup-bread sequence, versus the broken bread followed by the offered cup of wine. He states that current research has uncovered numerous variations on possible ritual forms of Eucharistic practice: 'It rather looks, therefore, as though a number of different combinations might have existed in the 250 years of Christianity's history and not just the three patterns I have outlined'. (Bradshaw 2004:60)

7.3.6 Improvisations of the Eucharistic Event in the Didaschalia

A very significant practice pertaining to early Eucharists is described in the Disaschalia, which directs Christians to

> Gather together actually in the cemeteries and read the Holy Scriptures and without any observances perform your ministry and your supplication to God; and offer an acceptable Eucharist, the likeness of the body of Christ, both in your congregation and in your cemeteries and on the departure of those who have fallen asleep; - pure bread that is made with fire, and sanctified by means of invocations; and without doubting you should pray and offer for those who have fallen asleep. (cited by Bradshaw 2004:105)

This improvisation upon the Eucharistic event could function as Christian witness to unbelievers, and possibly, a ritual replacement for the common cultural practice of *refrigerium* in Greco-Roman cemeteries. These Eucharists were to 'pray and offer for those who have fallen asleep' and not only was the Eucharistic event used as a means of symbolically eating a meal with those who had died in Christ, it also, in some way, assisted the deceased through prayers and offerings. This practice was stopped by the church, partly due to the complaint that these were just 'big drinking parties'. (Bradshaw 1992:106) Note the similarity to complaints by VNEs regarding the LDG ceremonies! Other similarities to the LDG are apparent here: memorializing and symbolically connecting with the one who had died, and performing the Eucharist, a set apart, but memorial meal as an offering for the deceased. Food offerings in the context of LDG rites are sacralised after the ceremonial burning of incense and the invitation to the ancestor to request his or her presence. In both cases, the main object is unity with, remembrance of, and possibly, fellowship with the deceased.

7.3.7 An Innovation: The Medicine of Immortality

Ignatius described the Eucharist as the 'medicine towards immortality'. He called this' the medicine of immortality, the antidote to prevent us from dying ... causes that we should live forever in Jesus Christ'. (cited by Alikin 2010) Alikin explains that this was 'originally a popular medical term, designating an ointment or elixir, which according to legend, had been invented by Isis, and was said to cure all sorts of diseases. The idea that the Eucharist was a remedy for mortality, was to become popular in early Christianity'. (2010:133) This enculturation into Christian form and belief was taken from Egyptian religious beliefs, appropriated into Christian thought, and is a belief prevalent in many branches of Christianity today. Some VNE contributors believed that the LTT had the power of physical healing, if taken worthily and with faith. None of the Last Supper narratives, of course, allude to this in any way. Along with healing and eternal life, the belief that the bread and wine (body and blood) of Christ is spiritual food and drink, and that we are nourished with it for health and healing by partaking of the sacred food is 'threaded 'into the theologies of many branches of Christianity. The belief that the Eucharist provides health and healing for the body was stated by AB Simpson: 'The Lord's Supper very intimately connected with our physical life, and it brings to us the actual bodily strength of the Lord Jesus Christ if we rightly partake'. (1888:209) This dogma is never or little stated in the HTTL-C3 mother denomination, and other denominations sharing these dogmas. Only (HTLAS-C7) charismatic church and Anglican (CCOH-1) congregation emphasized this aspect of Eucharistic practice.

7.3.8 The Emphasis on the Sacrificial: Jewish and Gentile Influences

If one looks only at New Testament narratives on the Last Supper (and Paul's discussion of it in 1 Corinthians 10-11) we see the unilateral covenant instituted as the Last Supper is celebrated. Jesus' expression 'this is my body, this is my blood, given for you' requests

nothing back from his disciples. Those partaking bring nothing but his or herself, no form of oblation or offering. The narratives focus totally on the unconditional: Jesus' body and blood is given unilaterally, in Semitic imagery through the sharing of the bread and cup, seen figuratively as his body and blood. The requirement asked us by Jesus is a joining of one's life to His, enacted through remembrance and repetition.

Pervasive in ancient societies was that of 'bringing an offering', and rituals which were both gift and/or propititory (sacrificial) were commonly seen both in Jewish Temple orthopraxy and in Gentile temple practices. Gift exchange (Mauss 1970) is commonly seen in the worship of all deities in Vietnam. Food offerings, as gift exchange, are essential in AV rites. To come without an offering to any deity or to an ancestor would be unthinkable. Gentile temple practices in the Greco-Roman world were also forms of gift exchange. To perform rites in the temples required offerings of some kind. This common, perhaps, universal behaviour, indicates inscribed dispositions (such as the mutual obligation of *ơn*) leading to the giving of commodities to receive a commodity in return (including nonmaterial goods) whether offered to God, deities, ancestors, or other humans. (Mauss 1970) In some early Christian documents, there are hints of sacrificial offerings in descriptions of the Eucharistic rite. Even the first century document, the *Didache,* stipulates that all who want to partake of the Eucharist should confess unlawful deeds 'that your sacrifice be pure'. (14.1) That is, the Eucharist is 'an offering' to God the Father. However, if, it 'modifies the moral condition of the person who accomplishes it', and is performed as a sacrificial offering it goes beyond common gift exchange. (Hubert & Mauss 1964:13) The Didache states that as the actions comes from humans to Him through physical elements and from human hands, the entire action is consecrated to God the Father. This describes actions going beyond simple gift exchange but is a sacrificial or propitiatory offering. The whole action was seen as sacrificial, not simply the food items. This Eucharistic ritual, then, was expressed as a more embodied practice.

A little later in antiquity this language changed, as in the Hippolytus anaphora, which says, 'we offer you the bread and cup' (Buchanan 1984:29), separating the bread and cup from the rest of the Eucharistic event. The anaphora in the East Syriac Liturgy of Addai and Mari (still in use today in the Assyrian Church of the East) contains an example of enculturated Jewish prayers into the Eucharistic *anaphora,* one which instilled sacrificial concepts. Stevenson states that it is 'strongly Semitic in character. It keeps that imprecise metaphor of the whole Eucharist as sacrificial':

> You O Lord in your unspeakable mercies…in the commemoration of the body and the blood of your Christ which we offer to you upon the holy and pure altar…May he come O Lord, your Holy Spirit and rest upon this oblation of your servants…for the pardon of debts (cited in Buchanan 1984:29)

In this very early anaphora, however, it is not the bread and the cup brought as oblations, but the entire offering is, in fact, 'the commemoration of Christ's death'; a spiritualized sacrifice. Thus, while the action is seen as sacrificial, and the partaker seeks to 'modify his moral position by partaking in it', its sacrificial character is distinctly different than later Eucharistic rites which invites the Holy Spirit to come only upon the elements 'being offered' in which an individual needs to examine himself in order to be worthy to consume the elements. In rare cases such as this, the enculturated Semitic form of the *anaphora* did not surrender to the later language and conceptions that were institutionalized in the Roman church. The Liturgy of Addai and Mari retained its Semitic origins and is a living part of Eucharistic orthopraxy today, both in Syria and its archdiocese in India.[92]

These passages indicate that young Christian communities (both Gentile and Jewish) saw the Eucharist in slightly different ways due to varying 'structuring structures' which inculcated different dispositions and this impacted new orthopraxy. These innovations and improvisations allowed enculturation of the Eucharist into their given cultures. The practice of Eucharistic event, as seen in early Christian antiquity carried an

[92] the archdiocese of the Chaldean Syrian Church of India.

ontological reality little seen in many churches today. Allowed to practice the Eucharist through enculturated dispositions natural to the worshippers allowed it to be a 'startling realism' connection to ontological realities little seen in modern Christianity.

7.3.9 The Beginning of Harmonization and the Formation of an Institutionalized Eucharistic Rite

Sometime during the second century, Eucharistic consecration prayers began to be used more frequently, ones that included the invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the elements along with the use of various kinds of *anaphoras*. These even began including language which indicated a change in the elements, such as 'Let your Holy Word God of truth, come upon this bread that the bread become the body of the Word, and upon this cup, that this cup become the blood of truth' (Buchanan 1984:29) Almost inevitably, as Gentile forms and presentation gradually became predominant, and as New Testament texts were more available, some formularies drawn from the texts in 1 Corinthians 10 and Luke 19 were used in many Eucharistic rituals. Over the next two hundred years, the enculturated expressions within individual local Christian community in specific cultures were gradually replaced by carefully selected and ordered *anaphoras*, controlled by the bishopric (and, in some cases, only the bishop could preside over the Eucharistic event). These included selective institution narratives, focused less upon the Jewish ritual of *eucharisteo,* and more upon the elements and the presence of Jesus within them.

From the third century onwards, the Eucharist gradually gained in ritualization, over time becoming delineated as a sacred rite separated by a great chasm from all profane, or common activity. The sacred versus profane distinctions separating the sacramental actions of praying over and partaking of the elements, it's separation from an actual meal, and the need to purify oneself before partaking allowed processes of reification, abstraction, and even, as O'Loughlin believes, falsification, (O'Loughlin, T. 2015:191) to begin. Bradshaw concludes his work on the origins of the Eucharist by

explaining:

> We have come a long way from the simply domestic rituals that seem to have constituted the historical roots of the Eucharist. By the end of the fourth century not only had the original meal long since been reduced to symbolic proportions but at least for some of those who were there it had now become more often something to be watched and worshipped from afar than something to be consumed…But while the meal had decreased in size, the prayers over the bread and cup had increased in length to become much more substantial complex orations in public settings…For all that, their theology still remained largely undeveloped. It was only towards the end of the century that we see the first explicit signs appearing in these texts of the Eucharistic doctrines that had already been the established beliefs of their users for a considerable period of time (2004:157)

Toward the fourth century, concurrent with the dissemination of the New Testament texts as well as the rise of an institutionalized, hierarchical male priesthood, change was inevitably produced: these diverse practices were gradually reformed into a highly standardized complex ritual. The Eucharistic event, moving from brevity to prolixity particularly in terms of the spoken prayers from the institution narratives which were not even originally included in primitive Eucharistic events. Diverse cultural practices, particularly those incorporating Jewish prayers, which centred around *eucharisteo*, (thanksgiving to the Father for Jesus' death), were submerged under other concepts such as *anamnesis* and the consecration of the elements through specific and carefully crafted *anaphoras.* Formal theologies of Eucharist emerged. These theologies and its attending orthopraxy form a very different picture in comparison to early church practices. The early improvisations nearly disappeared, along with the actual meal that would have been a part of Jewish table fellowship, especially seen in the *haggadah,* or, Passover meal, from which the Last Supper ritual was created. (Jeremias 1966) Only a few references to Old Testament metaphors remained. The elements of diversity expressed in these various cultural forms died out and were replaced by standardized Eucharistic anaphora and presentation used in Roman and/or Orthodox churches.

7.3.10 Radical Reform of Eucharistic Rites in the Reformation

In the late medieval period, the Eucharistic event came to encompass the corporal presence of Christ received through the elements, and defined in metaphysical terms which was never indicated in early practices. The metaphors of sacrificial offering moved

gradually toward and culminated in, (during the late medieval period) a complete theology comprised of the re-offering of Christ's sacrifice upon the altar performed only by an initiated a member of the priesthood (transubstantiation).

Central conflicts in the Reformation centred on if and how the Eucharist contained the corporeal presence of Jesus in the bread and wine. Various interpretations emerged to try to rectify the perceived errors, and theologies familiar to the Protestant Church today emerged. Three hermeneutics emerged: within Lutheranism, transubstantiation was replaced with the doctrine of consubstantiation and ubiquity. Calvin's exegeses defined it as the presence of the Holy Spirit along with the elements (parallelism). According to Zwingli, the elements signifiers pointing to Christ, with its main emphases on *anamnesis*. All of these theologies eliminated much sacrificial language, (that which referred to the doctrine of transubstantiation and Jesus' sacrificial death re-enacted in the mass) in attempts to return to the more original understanding of the Eucharistic event. Simplifications of the Eucharistic ritual were carried out in accord with adherence to a simplified lifestyle that constituted holiness and were often reactional against perceived ostentation, wealth and dominance of the Roman church. However, the Eucharist was unchanged in form and presentation: it remained a highly symbolic, abstract, (reified) event using elements that contained little similarity to domestic ritual centred around table fellowship. These symbolized elements were only taken if an individual was in a state of personal holiness or grace, and only performed by carefully defined clergy. Thus, it was a rare event, even for Protestants, until the second half of the twentieth century. With an epistemological shift toward post-modern thought, it has become so reified, and the sense of sacredness, in many cases, is so diffused it is seen as peripheral in many churches, particularly in Evangelical churches that emphasize the proclamation of the Word.

7.4 Separation to Holiness as Context for VNE Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy

The doctrinal pillars of Zwinglian theology formed the central hermeneutic of the

Eucharist within Holiness movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The C & MA mission agency only functioned as an umbrella agency for various denominations, but AB Simpson and Olsen's views on the meaning of Eucharist prevailed among their missionaries. In the only Protestant (Evangelical) training school for pastoral leadership in the entire country of Vietnam, many of Simpson's teachings were faithfully taught. This common set of dogmas in the (HTTL-C3) mother denomination were transmitted to new settings when some of these leaders founded new Western Evangelical denominations in Vietnam. Olsen's commentary and teaching continue to form the dogma and practice of many VNE churches today. These interpretations are still accepted uncritically by VNE leaders in these churches, as well as in VNE congregations (C2), (C4) and (C5) in this research. Congregations in locations CCOH-C1 (Anglican) and C7-HTLAS, (non-denominational-charismatic) were led by pastors trained within this HTTL-C1 hermeneutic, but made deliberate decisions to embrace new theologies.

7.5 The Lord's Supper as *Kergyma*

VNEs believe, as taught by Simpson, that one of the obligations for inclusion in the participation in the LTT event was to personally proclamation of the gospel, and this is interpreted by VNEs as a solemn obligation, which one performs as part of the cycle of mutual obligation. Simpson, coming from a Reformed background, gradually evolved slightly in his Reformed views over time, and a more Zwinglian emphasis came to the fore. The dogma centred on *kerygma* came to be a central obligation, in adherence to the practice of the Lord's Supper.

> It is something that we are to personally PROCLAIM a) For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Cor. 11:26; ACV) b) ... the verb makes clear that the partaking of the elements at the Lord's Supper is a "proclamation" (an evangel) of the Lord's death (W. E. Vine) c) Taking communion is a public confession of your faith in Christ, what He has done, and the benefits derived thereof. You are declaring to Christ you believe in Him and what He has done on your behalf, to the devil that you acknowledge his defeat, and to men everywhere that you are not ashamed to be identified and to be in union with Christ [sic] (Simpson:1888, accessed 12/8/2018)

While benefits of the LTT are mentioned briefly, its central purpose is to proclaim the

death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the world in which one lives. Beginning with the HTTL mother denomination, (HTTL-C3) this duty to evangelize is central to one's obligation, as such, if one is unwilling to perform this, one is not worthy to partake. VNEs carry out these duties, as can be seen, very carefully in the performance of the Eucharistic event (LTT) for if one carefully carries out one's sacred duty, only then is one privileged to participate in this sacred, but symbolic event.

7.6 The Elements of Bread and Cup as Signifiers

Van Dyk explains a key feature of Zwinglian theology:

> The separation of sign and reality is a key feature of Zwingli sacramental theology… Jesus Christ has instituted them and so they are sacred. They confirm historical events. They are a support to faith …They are thus are the means by which the community calls to mind the heart and truth of the gospel…Zwingli understood the congregation, in its acts of dedication and gratitude to be the primary subjects'. (cited by Smith G 2008:72)

VNE leaders consistently adhere to a non-sacramental theology; all pastor contributors insisted that it 'was a symbol, after all'. (C4-15m) It was seen as a *hình bóng* [shadow, picture of] (C6-3f), *tượng trưng* [representation of] (C3-7m); there was very careful designation and separation to indicate that one was not actually consuming the body and blood of Christ. Much VNE hermeneutic was a reaction to Catholicism. This is indicated in Olsen's work in which he dedicates a half a chapter to explaining that the LTT is absolutely not an enactment of sacrifice or, one that has Christ's corporeal presence in the elements. Included in his systematic theology (1958:1027-34) was a long discussion on the errors of transubstantiation. Teaching for VNEs leaders included, as matter of course, reactional teachings on why the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation was heretical, and these reactional elements aid in the formation of the doctrine on the Eucharist in current use among VNE churches. Many VNE leaders interviewed mentioned the errors of transubstantiation. (C4-1m, C4-15m, C4-16, C2-5m, C3-7m) The LTT, in accordance with Zwinglian doctrine, is not defined as a sacrament, but an ordinance, and no grace is transferred to one upon reception. Van Dyk stresses

> although Zwingli advocates a representational memorialism for the Lord's Supper it is a mistake to conclude that he holds a "mere" memorialism. He has no wish to deny the Divine Presence in the Supper or in the community of faith'. (cited by Smith, 2008:70)

VNEs clearly believe in God's presence during the performance of the LTT, and that the ritual has some efficacy. Whether the Evangelical presentation is understood or not, all believed that God was present; this in itself indicates efficacy. Some VNE contributors saw it as the 'medicine of immortality' which could bring health and healing. Statements from contributors stressing that the LTT was efficacious in terms of healing and judgement, as well as their very serious treatment of it, and elevation of its ritual stance all indicate that they see the LTT in ontological terms, more than simply commemoration, and a conjoining with God's divine presence. VNE contributors, while clearly sacralising the LTT ceremony, did not call it an actual sacrament; only one leader (C6-16m) mentioned that it was 'an outward sign of an inward grace', and this because he had been ordained as a Methodist minister in Korea, and had adopted and assimilated new doctrines. However, in practice, they treat it as sacramental, a holy and separated act, as well as a fulfilment of duties, (Chapter Six), and, in many cases, is performed as mutual obligation, expressing practice in sync with a filial *habitus*.

7.7 Consequences for Partaking Unworthily: God's Judgement

Simpson, founder of the C & MA mission agency, wrote:

> The Lord's Supper is very intimately connected with our physical life, and it brings to us the actual bodily strength of the Lord Jesus Christ if we rightly partake. And so, on the other hand, it brings to us sickness and death if we abuse it. The two-edged sword cuts both ways, either in blessing or in judgment as we meet it. There is no doubt that many Christians are suffering from sickness, and perhaps their very lives have been shortened because they have sat down at this holy table cherishing willfully unholy resentments and knowingly indulging in forbidden things (1888:209)

Olsen indicates that the LTT has efficacy 'as spiritual food to feed us and protect us' (Olsen, 1958:20) following Simpson's lead, but the LTT was not described in this way by VNEs in congregations. (C2, C3, C4, C5 C6) Overwhelmingly, descriptions centred exclusively around *anamnesis*. A few of these contributors, however, did discuss the LTT in terms of healing, particularly congregations in locations C5 and C7. All VNEs

were fearful of partaking unworthily; they believed bad consequences could result, including sickness. A very concrete interpretation of 1 Corinthians 10:6-10 reinforced these beliefs in God's judgment.[93] VNEs adhere to Simpson's statements on health and healing, but mainly in its reverse: receiving God's judgment for partaking unworthily. Contributors shared stories on both sides: a few testified to healing through partaking of it (C6-1f), but more mentioned the fear of judgment if partaking unworthily. (C4-1m, C5-1) Leaders, if asked, agreed taking worthily incurred benefit, but only congregations (HTLAS-C7) and (IHCKC-C6) had healing testimonies. Some VNEs contributors acknowledged physical benefits, but in doubtful terms, while a few saw the LTT as powerful in these terms, and could describe these benefits. Fear of judgement figured heavily in VNE responses on Eucharistic practice.

7.8 Displacements in Eucharistic Practice and the VNE Response to Them

Several areas of displacement (reification), significantly affected the ability of VNEs to understand the LTT. Scholars who have extensively examined the origins and development of Eucharistic rites also decried the reification process:

> By the late fourth century, not only had the original meal long since been reduced to symbolic proportions but at least for some of those who were there it had now become more often something to be watched and worshipped from afar rather than to be consumed. (Bradshaw 2004:157)

The reification of the Eucharist contributes to a loss of meaning in terms of communality with the sole emphasis (particularly disabling in a highly communal society), as a purely individualist examination of one's self, and a re-dedication of one's life to the practice of holiness. The taking of the LTT for those worthy recipients was seen as a high and holy duty, though for VNEs, is intermingled in many cases with 'sacrality of remembrance 'an enactment originating from a filial *habitus.* (Chapter 6) VNE leaders uncritically accepted this reified ritual as the correct form that was passed down for four generations, until

[93] See Chapter Six, 2.5.

recently, when some leaders began forming new denominational allegiances and adopting new hermeneutics based upon the theologies of those new allegiances.

7.8.1 A Ritual about Food, but Where is the Food?

Early Eucharists based upon Jewish ritual and prayers of blessing, praise and thanksgiving to the Father (*eucharisteo*) included a full meal, with the ritual prayers intertwined within it, either as *berakoth* or *hagaddah.* Since the ritual was integrated within the meal itself, all the food items were essentially seen as 'holy food', and the meal was a declaration, or proclamation of oneness with Christ exclusive of other spiritual beings; 'the table of the Lord', and not the 'table of demons'. The sharing of one cup was an expression of complete dedication to Jesus Christ as His disciple, to the exclusion of all others, and a willingness to follow in His footsteps, possibly even to martyrdom.

For VNEs, their acceptance of the Eucharist as a symbolic, highly minimalized ritual act with almost no embodied action (except consuming the elements) and no actual food items minimizes the possibility of the elements being seen as imbued with supernatural powers. Yet, some contributors associated it with a distinct efficacy, primarily in terms of healing, and in two cases (C7-1m, C7-2f) with overcoming demonic power. VNE's uncritical acceptance of the reified form taught to them is due to the fear of it seeming to be a idolatrous encounter with physical objects analogous to numerous spiritual cults surrounding them. (Keane 2007) Added to this is a reactional theology against the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. Any actions tied to material elements must be carefully controlled to avoid attaching undue power to them, and these need to be carefully classed as only symbols of Jesus death, that is, as simply memorial, so that no misunderstandings result. Other objects or actions must be stringently avoided. Thus, the Zwinglian theology and hermeneutic taught to early leaders, was, oddly, a 'fit' with the epistemology of early VNE leaders, with the strong emphasis on *anamnesis* and elements as signifiers, due to fears of these elements being imbued with supernatural

powers. While fear of the rite being misunderstood and smacking of idolatrous practices, the duties surrounding it, as well as anamnesis, allowed it to be re-interpreted inchoately, in many cases, as expressions of a filial dispositions, but elevated to a higher and more sacred duty only given to God underneath its Western encasement.

Food offering as gift exchange, propitiatory or sacrificial offerings brought to God in exchange for a change in one's moral status is carefully avoided. However, sacrificial action is required of each participant by self-examination (*tự xét mình)*. This is a serious duty, and rededication of oneself to God. Here a sacrificial element is seen, but one which resonates with Romans 12:1: 'offer your bodies as a living sacrifice … this is your true and proper worship'. The worshipper believes that she will come away from the rite a better person, as Lạc, (C2-1f) said, 'you feel embarrassed with God … you need to try to do better in your life'. Thus, the worshipper offers himself, believing that he will be morally changed after self-examination, confession, and rededication. Contrast this to the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, which sees the entire Eucharistic event as an 'imprecise sacrificial metaphor'. (p. 18) Yet this improvisation of sacrificial metaphor related to the Eucharist fit within a Christian orthodoxy. VNE pastors are careful to explain that the elements of the LTT are purely symbolic out of fear of the LTT being seen as idolatrous; this would make it a ritual synonymous to the myriad of ritual offerings given to various deities. In early Eucharistic events, even when the full meal was no longer a part of the ritual, the early church did not see the Eucharistic food as symbolic, but as McGowan explains

> Most Christian writings from the second century on suggest that the power and the character of the Eucharistic food were upheld with startling realism. There is no hint that they were merely signs to assist with the remembrance of an idea or understanding of a doctrine or that their reality depended on the attitude of the recipient. (2014:47)

While VNEs leaders were very careful to stay within the defined symbolic language, at least one lay contributor (as well as subtle language used by other contributors) used language indicative of a higher reality, calling it simply the 'body and blood of Jesus

Christ, that's what it is'. (C4-2f) Not all contributors indicated concrete separation between signifiers and ontological realities. This 'startling realism', was, on occasion, subtly declared.

The idea of the LTT being associated with an actual meal would then, be hard to understand and hard to justify by VNEs; meals are an essential, common part of normal life, part of family relationships and domesticity. The LDG, while separating the actual, rather brief ritual of incense and invitation and always followed by a meal, is also ritualistic in terms of types of dishes, who consumes it, and how it is consumed (with offered food as special items). The LTT elements are taken with no table fellowship, and cannot be considered actual food items, simply symbols of them. The LDG ceremony enriches and enhances relationships, belonging, family, and includes food, fellowship and fun. The LTT contains none of this, is done in a solemn silent atmosphere, with fears of being condemned for sinful behaviour. To do otherwise would indicate a loss of sacredness. The LTT is not seen as an encounter with materiality (food and drink) or even, fellowshipping, communing, or sacrifice. For many it is simply a symbolic act (as is seen in most Evangelical churches today) in fact, one so abstract and symbolized that there is no real need to have any material elements at all (the Anglican congregation CCOH-C1 is an exception to this). This abstract, symbolic abstraction provides a defence for VNEs against the surrounding culture. It looks so different from any spiritual practice in society that there is no fear of it being misconstrued as an idolatrous practice and there is no mistaking that it is worship offered to any other being but the God of Christianity, Đức Chúa Trời.

7.8.2 Reinforcing the Separation of the Sacred versus the Profane

This reified version inherited and practised by VNEs was seen as clean, (untainted by any objects, forms or customs reminiscent of former idolatrous practice), sacred, and as one contributor said, in comparing the LTT with the LDG, 'a mystery…but the LDG is just

common, or normal'. (PS Focus Group 2, 2016) In performance, as observed, as well as from contributor's discussions, a high distinction is indicated in terms of separation of the sacred and the profane, thus one has a serious duty to live a separated life of holiness. Certainly, in most VNE churches, the idea of separation of the sacred and profane has become more pronounced, as was seen in data in all churches except HTLAS-C7. It was particularly seen in the HTTL (C3) mother denomination and the (HTGL-C4) Methodist congregation. Although originally taught by missionaries as a simple 'object lesson 'of Jesus' death for us, many VNE leaders have gradually elevated it in terms of sacrality by adding ritualization to the rite, to emphasize this separation to holiness trait.

7.9 Conclusion

As seen in the examples above, a great amount of diversity occurred within early practices of the Eucharist in early Christian communities. These differences were so striking, in some cases, as to make the Eucharist seem a nearly unrecognizable ritual to Evangelical denominations today. Yet, in their time, culture and society, each was accepted as an expression of orthodoxy within Christian practice.

Within the whole of Christendom, the Eucharist as a multivalent ritual encompasses many forms, theological views, doctrines, beliefs, presentations and orthopraxis. It may focus on communality and fellowship, (*koinonia)*, unity, covenant, memory (*amanensis*), the Messianic feast, (*eschaton),* sacrificial language and action (pointed either toward the re-enactment of the sacrificial death, as in Catholicism, or toward the congregant, in 'offering one's life up as a sacrifice'), blessing, praise and thanksgiving for what God has created and given, along with the death of Jesus: all of these elements may form the ritual *eucharisteo,* from which we derive its name. Today in many scenarios, particularly Protestantism, it functions as a multivalent ritual only in abstraction, not as embodied ritual. The highly reified presentations (showing a uniform conformity) are also greatly limited in structural and liturgical form.

Early Eucharists showed diversity that drew from within each specific cultural framework, from the structuring structures of specific society, and inscribed dispositions of those cultures. The VNE expression, then, which evidences filiality in its expression of the Eucharistic event, functions, as well, within the boundaries of a broad Christian orthodoxy. Contributors appropriated *anamnesis* as the sacrality of remembrance, occasionally mentioning *koinonia*, (unity with Christ and one another), and, at times, as the medicine of immortality for our health and healing and/or spiritual food. This was overlaid with the Western trait of separation for holiness with rigid boundaries between the sacred and the profane. In comparison with these examples from antiquity, there was essentially no diversity and no improvisation in VNE dogma, and little in terms of presentation of the LTT ritual, except in congregations (C1-CCOH, and C7-HTLAS) that have embraced other Western theologies and presentation. O'Loughlin gives some explanation for historical diversity and its necessity in Eucharistic practice:

> If diversity is moreover a key note of Eucharistic origins, praxis and theology, then because Christianity is conservative of its past – it is always looking backwards in liturgy and in study – then complex diversity is the living reality of Christian activity no matter how boldly a group either denies that fact, strives for uniformity, or makes exclusive claims for a particular theological vision. (2015:8)

This is a significant and encouraging statement for those attempting to bring the Christian message into areas of the world that are slightly or completely untouched by Western Christianity. All new orthopraxis can (and necessarily should) show a specific cultural diversity and possibility for improvisation. As the understanding of *habitus* dictates, every ritual, particularly those new Christian communities in cultures to which the Christian message is un-enculturated will be interpreted in diverse manners, concept and presentation, enabling unique improvisations and innovations, but which can fit well into the boundaries of a Christian orthodoxy. Even in Vietnamese Evangelicalism, in which the outward presentation and orthodoxy imitated their respected missionary leadership and implemented the ritual conscientiously according to the theological concepts taught to them, their own inscribed dispositions of filial piety, (*hiếu*) obligation, (*ơn*) and the

obligation to show gratitude (*biết ơn)* 'bleed through' to give it more significant meaning, allowing some limited efficacy (for at least some congregants). If the LTT is not seen from the inculcated filial disposition, it is not, or is very little, understood.

These displacements in terms of the loss of materiality, loss of ontological reality and embodied ritual do not allow for specific cultural expression, and the loss of this expression has the effect of losing efficacy, leading some VNE contributors to describe it 'just a tradition' (C4-1m) 'it was powerless' (C7-1m) 'people didn't treat it seriously, they were looking at their phones' C1-1f), 'I went every month, but it was just a tradition' (C4-10f) and so on. Such complaints are never made in general society regarding the LDG, which due to inscribed, essential practices previously discussed, continues to fascinate and attract all Vietnamese, even VNEs who have left off practising the rites. As Ha, (C8-3f) explained to me using an American idiom, 'they do this … because it's just who they are'. She recognized the filial dispositions that moved her relatives to perform the rites, and she herself could never feel free from obligation due to the cultural severing and social dislocation produced.

If improvisation and innovation were permitted through primary voices, and if the VNE leaders did not feel such a desperate need to enforce Western acculturations within their orthopraxis, certainly new forms that are purely Vietnamese (certainly showing filial expressions) would emerge. This, of course, has yet to happen in any concrete manner. The diverse expressions of these inscribed cultural dispositions is essential, for it allows enculturation of the Christian message into its surrounding culture, through improvisations and innovations (such as those detailed above) express those very unique cultural forms as each is integrated into Christian orthopraxy. This makes it possible for the surrounding culture to recognize the *praeparatio evangelica* already embedded in it, and make God's truths implanted in a given society, its people and culture, clearly recognizable to all.

Chapter Eight

Keys from an Enculturation Approach Toward an Epistemological Shift

8.1 Developing Local Theologies through an Enculturation Model

This thesis provides description of the ecclesial practices of VNE communities through analysis of ethnographic data within qualitative research, and is a contribution to knowledge, for no rigorous scholarship exists in this area. (1.4.20) Those traits which give evidence of enculturated beliefs and behaviours through practice were found in VNE orthodoxy and orthopraxy, particularly the LTT, as well as surrounding areas of ecclesial practice. Primary data shows that traditional traits of filiality, an inscribed *habitus,* lie within the hearts and minds of all Vietnamese, whether the individual is part of an Evangelical community or not. While social change has been profound in the last one hundred years, due to colonization, modernization resulting in a weakened Confucian ethos, Socialist ideology, including, in some cases, social engineering, the enculturated trait of filiality has remained constant, as seen in primary data among both VNEs and non-VNEs, whether Buddhist, non-religious, Catholics or Communist party members (Chapters 3-5). Improvisation of filial practice occurred in different settings, in Vietnam in Catholic and Buddhist settings, and in the diaspora, as documented by Jellema (2007, 2007b) and Padgett (2007) due to migration. Yet the central value of filial piety, due to the structuring structures of society and internal dispositions continue to show it as the supreme virtue. (Liu 2003:1) VNEs implicitly recognize filiality as a desired Christian virtue, even though it is extant in Vietnamese culture and is not a theological 'fit 'with the replacement theology they currently adhere to.

This enculturated disposition has rich potential for development of local theologies. The filial *habitus* functions as an underground river which supports and undergirds an epistemological view of the world, and the underlying ethical dispositions associated with it. This *habitus* determines how one lives in it, and as an underground

river will suddenly appear above ground, the trait of filiality makes a sudden and subtle appearance in the Eucharistic event of VNEs, the LTT. Schreiter himself notes,

> the development of local theology depends as much on finding Christ already active in the culture as it does on bringing Christ to the culture. The great respect for culture has a Christological basis. It grows out of a belief that the risen Christ's salvific activity in bringing about the kingdom of God is already going on before our arrival'. (1985:29)

Schreiter's idealized method is based upon bringing needed change through acculturation combined with the incarnational message of Christ as inculturation. This can only occur in mission communities already in existence, and by assuming that these Christian mission communities exist everywhere in the world, though, in fact, in a large part of the world among many cultures, no expression of the historical Christian message exists at all. At times, acculturation may become a positive force if it is embraced within an entire society by consensus, that is, if collective agency is in play. This is assimilated as cultural borrowing (Herskovitz 1949) into a culture to the extent that it becomes an enculturated trait (mediated through bodily practice) which then affects the next generation.[94] However, that has not occurred within VNE practice. This agency has not been in play; in these cases, it does not lead to Schreiter's desired inculturation which has connected to the historical Christian message. This lack is seen in the practice of *hiếu kính cha mẹ.* (5.2.3), due to the lack of an expression of sacrality of remembrance as 'looking to the source'. However, the use of the term Ông Trời*,* as a bridge for the Christian message as an inculturation key may be an effective one, for VNEs seem to have eagerly embraced this; collective agency is in play. In this sense, cultural borrowing, probably derived from De Rhodes catechism approach, if encouraged by local leadership, could birth a more fulfilment theological approach which has the potential to lead to forms of Christian enculturation.

[94] In terms of material culture, the advent of mobile phones is an example of cultural borrowing rapidly becoming enculturated into numerous cultures, in fact, there are probably no cultures in the world who are now untouched by this form. It seems to have been eagerly embraced by all without any cultural conflict.

Schreiter's contextual model (1985:12–16) was re-shaped in this research to seek out traits already extant in the Vietnamese culture. This was done by identifying the disposition of filiality as an ethical disposition, or, collective *habitus*, an inhabituated disposition that was expressed inchoately in many cases through the Lễ Tiệc Thánh, and at times, in the mundane activities of life (see Chapter Five). This inculcated trait of filiality shows potential for building cultural bridges into society at large, for it has, in the consensus of the local believing community, (a collective agency) seen as a Christian virtue (even while not all practice attached to it is seen as such) for it falls within the community's boundaries of orthodoxy in their interpretation of Scripture. This research attempted to move beneath, around and under the foreign form of ritual and seek out that which was truly Vietnamese beneath these forms. This eliminates the need to try to re-twist or re-shape the local believing communities' ecclesiologies and parse into them the accepted Western Evangelical/Holiness ritual practices (functional substitutes). This model, done from an emic position, does not attempt to build overt new forms of practice, theologies or ecclesiologies, but rather, sees the community as the vital means of developing these key forms, whether by didactic means, or by implementing simple practices done particularly in family or Christian community settings. The primary voices concur that filiality is a Christian virtue and should be practiced first, toward God Himself. The agency of local Christian communities is critical as a means for gaining the understanding of these primary, pre-embedded theologies, and these voices are the essential voices in implementing change. Both prosaic and ritual forms of this must be developed by insiders (VNEs) versus outsiders, who can only aid by providing a roadmap of the direction they should take. The Christian community needs to be integrally involved, as well as the final authority in determining which improvisational means are implemented to attempt the development of local theologies. Local theologies cannot be produced without their input, for, in fact, these communities are the producers of those

theologies. It is in drawing upon these underlying filial dispositions through which enculturation can begin to emerge. This allows for these communities to build, through practice and improvisation, with the ultimate goal of a Christocentric-Vietnamese innovation being expressed as a trait within the wider society, versus a foreign model imposed from the top down. Thus, to find local theologies, a grass roots approach is necessary.

This enculturation model provided a heuristic means of developing local theology versus creating an academic theology (many of which simply end up on a dusty bookshelf). It seeks the means of discovery, a 'hands on' approach seeking out underlying contiguous bridges, inculcated extant dispositions which are allowed new expression through bodily mediated practice in the church, family and community, and contain the means of bridging cultural gaps between current VNE practices and society. If these expressed cultural dispositions are evaluated and accepted by the Christian community through a Scriptural ethic and practices and produce a comfortable fit with the filial, familial and communal practices of general society, the result is that those outside Evangelicalism are presented with a picture of Christian practices which resonate with culture at large. This allows for the development of new ecclesiologies that also resonate with the culture at large, as would the LTT, if improvisational and innovative approaches were implemented, particularly those which encourage a redeemed, grace-filled filiality.

Local theologies, as seen from field data, may be a heuristic means of developing a broader and more profound expression of *hiếu kính cha mẹ,* if it includes a 'looking to the source (the sacrality of remembrance) toward those who have died, (one's lineage) but most importantly, pointing toward the Divine Source (Đức Chúa Trời as Ông Trời). This broader expression of filiality may allow for true Christian enculturation to emerge.

It is important to remember that the communities in question must first desire these changes themselves; these cannot be imposed from without, although significant

outsiders may have some voice in the discovery process. If VNEs desire change, or desire their ecclesial and everyday embodied practices that resonate within Vietnamese culture and society they will inevitably will begin to try some forms of improvisation, such as those seen in the improvisations of the Eucharistic event in early churches. (Chapter Seven). Dramatic disruptions which produce social dislocation, such as extracting individuals from ethically-laden rituals, such as AV rites, do not allow for enculturation; this is evident after one hundred years of Evangelical presence in Vietnam. If this enculturated filial trait is to be allowed expression, accepted leaders must play the central role in creating definitive, overt theologies and ecclesiologies which may be taught didactically from the pulpit, in Sunday schools or in mentoring settings. This may allow the formation of new Christian enculturated practices seen in daily life as well as in formal ritual settings (the church).

8.2 The Barrier of Desired Acculturation: Fulfilling the Myth that 'West is Best '

Acculturation was discussed in several regards, particularly seen as need for dematerialization in practice as a means purification (Keane, 2007) leading to modern thought paradigms. These descriptions clearly indicated a desire for a Western ethos, as well as Western orthodoxies and orthopraxis in Vietnamese expressions of Christian worship. This orthopraxis for VNE leaders, seems to define, at least in some measure, what, for these leaders, is 'truly Christian'. Two contributors, Pastor__(C4-15m) and Pastor__(C1-14m), both stated 'the gospel came first to Europe, then to America, then to us'. Pastor__ (C1-14m) also added, 'Western Christianity is what God wants. It's God's will because He led the Apostle Paul to the West not to the East'. In other words, those who are last in line must accept the necessary replacement of cultural forms and acquiesce to the inevitable, that is, acculturated practices. The unexpressed implication was that Western culture is higher than Vietnamese culture, which is seen as being deeply corrupted by idolatry and evil spiritual practices. The trade-off in becoming a Christian

was that one was the inheritor of a higher culture, which is cleaner and not as corrupted as one's own. This pastor bemoaned the fact that Vietnamese culture had not been as assimilated to Western thought and lifestyle as Singapore and hoped that something of this nature would eventually occur in Vietnam. 'Maybe…' he said, 'the answer [to contextualization of the gospel] is globalization [in Vietnam]' In other words, VNEs should simply accept all spiritual practices being uncritically wrapped in Western clothes. Yet, KS Nguyên points out the phenomena of a Vietnamese syncretistic spirituality, in which he states

> within the long process of assimilation, the dialectic interplay of dual forces- resistance and assimilation – has shaped how the Vietnamese were able to both resist the religio-cultural influences from the outside and to assimilate moderately the essentials of the outside influences that were of specific interest to them'. (2017:290)

Many examples of this can be seen, including the creation of two distinct religions indigenous to South Vietnam, Cao Đài and Hoa Hào, which syncretized components of both Western and Eastern spirituality in developing their doctrines. (Hoskins 2011,2014) KS Nguyên mentions again the common element playing throughout Vietnamese history: agency. Vietnamese, though often 'under the gun' of colonizers throughout their history, were empowered through being able to make selective choices, 'assimilat[ing] moderately the…outside influences that were of specific interest to them'. (2017:290) Vietnamese society unequivocally assimilated ancestral practice as an expression of not only a collective Vietnamese identity in terms of place, the sacredness of 'looking to the source' (with Ông Trời as the ultimate source), along with high autonomy and tolerance for other spiritual practices. His thesis gives evidence that Vietnamese society in general reacted negatively to Evangelicalism due to Vietnam's syncretic spiritualism. Spiritual forms were gradually assimilated, in most cases over centuries, or at times, experienced decline (as, for example, with some forms of Daoism) due to cultural forces, outside cultural forces, controlling factors of the imperial court and Socialist political ideologies. Evangelicalism was not introduced as a possible 'one among many' spiritual expressions,

but as the only possible expression, and one with an entirely Western 'coating' unrecognizable and was thus, unacceptable. It was in the main, rejected by Vietnamese society; only accepted by individuals who were in the position to make such autonomous choices (and could face the consequences). In terms of Evangelical mission, defined within Western epistemologies, autonomy was of prime importance in the individual's conversion experience. This fit well with their understanding of an individualist thought paradigm which allows for personal transformation (Keane 2007:179) (conversion), for they feared the nominalism that had crept into many Western Protestant denominations. There is no doubt that the early Vietnamese Christians, particularly those who emerged as significant and very dedicated leaders, eagerly and non-critically adopted an Evangelical/Holiness model of ecclesial practice, which determined all means of transmitting truth through Christian ritual form, and ecclesial practice. Missionaries, such as (Irwin, MC-3m) were unequivocal in their statements that the Vietnamese pastoral trainees 'did exactly as we taught them 'in regard to the LTT.

Even those churches, such as the underground house church (HTLAS-C7), whose pastor did not have to give account to any higher institutional authority, and re-shaped the Eucharistic hermeneutic according after exegeting verses of Scripture, uncritically accepted a Western theological interpretation. VNEs obviously greatly fear, and are uncomfortable with a more Vietnamese presentation of ritual forms, such as the presentation of the LTT (even such simple changes as using that Asian staple, rice, versus bread, for the elements, has never occurred in any VNE church, to my knowledge). The only church in this research who had the means for improvisation were Mr Đen's family (IHCKC, C6) who had immigrated, were living in a location outside Evangelical institutional polity, and were themselves experimenting with a new lifestyle. For this family, the risk of improvisation, along with the approval of a missionary, allowed them an autonomy to improvise in looking for new expressions in ecclesial practice.

First generation VNEs as well as the current generation of VNE leaders felt that acculturation was a necessary ingredient for full acceptance: these leaders obviously felt that to truly become a practising Christian, or, at least to be included in Christian community, a full severing of ritual forms related to filial piety were necessary, and as Pastor Lê (1971b) noted, it was impossible to be truly filial toward one's ancestors, and illogical to assume that anyone could adequately worship all of one's ancestral line. In this purely logical argument he embraces a Western rationale as a means of purification. (Keane 2007) The defining argument was not, in fact, one of logic, but one of relationship; the expression of one's duty, gratitude and honour to those who gave us life. If ancestral veneration is defined in such a way, there can certainly be nothing in such practices that violates Christian orthodoxy. These issues cannot be solved by continuing to teaching the dogmas of Holiness theologies and inculturation key of *hiếu kính cha mẹ* described in Chapter Five. The hope that desired acculturation will take place and eventually spread into society at large, such as Lim (2015) and some Vietnamese pastors (Pastors (C3-7m) and (C1-14m) discussed is a vain one if the inculcated ethical dispositions of filiality are ignored or placed upon the periphery. General society will not allow room for this. The need to deliberately engineer one's culture through dematerialization and purification (acculturation) of practices becomes unnecessary if an enculturation model is used, and researching, evaluating and reflecting upon those traits already extant in the culture as placed there as well as designed by God Himself. In fact, some of the deliberately designed, but awkward, clumsy inculturation techniques might have been unnecessary if genuine enculturated traits, and internal dispositions that point toward Christianity, are discovered and examined.

8.3 Enculturation Seen in the Christocentric Filial Disposition in the LTT

An important contribution of this thesis is not simply to re-state the obvious the fact that

Vietnamese Christians believe in filial piety, but rather that, in spite of embracing Western accultured forms of spiritual practice, their ethical dispositions of filiality, that is, the filial *habitus*, does not change. The foundational tenets of filiality continue to undergird them throughout Christian practice and mundane life, both morally and culturally. Christian enculturation has had no chance to emerge in Vietnamese Evangelicalism, and connect and spread into the larger society, obscured, in part by the foreign ecclesial forms, and undergirded by a need for purification allowing an entrance into modernity (Keane 2007). Yet, a form of Christian enculturation emerges inchoately in the LTT (Chapter Six) as well as in mundane activities practiced by VNEs. It is elevated it as sacrality of remembrance toward God, re-shaped through the filial disposition, appropriating the Zwinglian concept of *anamnesis,* but overlaid with the needed acculturation of a separation to holiness. VNEs have appropriated *anamnesis* intuitively as sacrality of remembrance expressed as mutual obligation, a filial expression wrapped in a Western Evangelical ritual form. The deep sense of obligation attached to it, elevated by doctrinal teaching on personal holiness, imbues it with meaning unique to a VNE. It is not only filial in the terms of debt and honouring to one's forbears: VNEs have elevated these powerful central tenets of filiality and filial duty, along with its corresponding sacramentality toward remembering the ancestors and transferred them in many cases, to God Himself. VNE contributors emphasized mutual obligation and a very serious sense of duty to fulfil all obligations associated with the LTT. This was particularly seen in the HTTL-C3 and HTGL-C4 congregations.

While the material aspects of the LTT are severely minimalized, even as to the appearance of the elements of bread and juice, (which has no functionality as table fellowship, but is an abstract metaphor of remembrance) the filial disposition subtly re-emerges as one delves a bit beneath the surface through careful observation and discussions from contributors. VNEs, just as their counterparts in general society, show

undeniably filial dispositions; a Vietnamese enculturated trait is seen through the ritual expression of the LTT in spite of its limited materiality.

This could allow for an efficacy in Vietnamese ritual practice, and could be a very significant one if it is overtly taught as a filial ritual, yet one with an elevated filiality, a truly grace-filled filiality in which 'people [are able to] embody assumptions about their place in a larger order of things' (Bell 2009:xi), and with overt descriptions of sacrality of remembrance as looking to the source' which is, how 'human beings in the here-and-now [to connect to] … non-immediate sources of power, authority, and value'. (2009:xi) Bourdieu's lack of attention to the ontological aspect of habituated dispositions such as filiality is not supported here, for nearly all contributors sensed, or stated, that filiality was of a sacred nature. Bourdieu, in such a case, might simply re-define this trait/s as 'transfigured expressions of these economic and political facts'. (1977:61) His ethnographical work among the Kabyle ignores the sacred (Eliade, 1987); this points up a deficiency in Bourdieu's work. (Urban, 2003) 'Looking to the source' is more than a moral tenet, or a highly valued ideal, but an encultured sacred trait which points to the sacred beyond materiality, production and economics, and is held in common with many societies.

8.4 A Need for Fulfilment Theology versus Replacement Theology

It was seen in the data that VNEs expected that their stand against AV practices might bring some sort of reform to society, and eventually bring see society abandon these practices considered to be a form of idolatry. (C2-7m, C4-1m, C4-4f, C2-5m), This showed evidence of misrecognition in some cases. Replacement theology and a rejectionist approach in terms of contextualization have been part of the typical responses among VNEs, seen as an unequivocal stand for God against all other forms of worship. Looking at AV rites from the perspective of filial piety, however, demands that one see God working in the hearts and minds of Vietnamese people through the ages in a different

light: that of fulfilment, versus replacement. Building upon a grace-filled filiality recognizes the fact that God has indeed been working among the Vietnamese from the beginning of their history. Filial piety is seen expressed in the ritual of the LTT as an authentic enculturated trait, and lies in the hearts of all Vietnamese, not just toward parents and ancestors, but toward God. QHL Nguyen (2013:170) tells us:

> This concept of God as the first ancestor of all human beings resonates with the traditional worship of Heaven that has been lost in the present- day practice of ancestor worship. In ancient ancestor worship at the state level, a Vietnamese king represented his people first offered an annual sacrifice to Heaven, then to his ancestors at *Đàn Nam Giao*, a place consecrated for this specific ceremony. Thus, the evangelical Vietnamese Christian concept of filial piety reflects the piety toward God that ancestor worship traditionally values. The concept of venerating God as an ancestor, with its implication in the worship of Heaven, indicates that worshipping God was not new to the Vietnamese. As the king worshipped Heaven, the cult reveals that worshipping God was practiced at the state level in Vietnam. The practice had political implications because the king was the son of Heaven (*Thiên tử*). At the same time, it illustrated the Vietnamese people's belief in God … When Vietnamese Christians see God as the highest ancestor, it does not mean that they honor God by ancestral worship. Rather, this notion reflects the relationship they believe to have with God as father and children. It also reinforces the Protestant understanding of religion that centers on piety and belief in God. [sic]

This enculturated trait of filiality was intended to be expressed toward God Himself. However, an indigenous filiality needs redemption through its intersection with the full gospel message of Jesus Christ. Then, the Source will be truly revealed. PC Phan, speaking from within Catholicism, also confirms this disposition of filiality that may be expressed toward God:

> Filial piety, the Confucian virtue par excellence, remains a fundamental virtue in the Kingdom of God. But because God is the Father "from whom every family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph.3: 15), all piety that is rendered to human kings and fathers must be subordinated to and measured by our filial piety and obedience to God, who alone reigns in the *basileia tou theou.* (2003:91)

Other scholars have seen potential in fulfilment theology (Marshall, 2011) who defines it as 'the attempt to persuasively tell the story of Jesus as the appointed agent by whom Jewish (at least) tradition is challenged, affirmed, integrated and developed in love, according to God's plan for salvation and reform of nations'. (57) This story may include understanding of how filial piety may intersect with the story of Jesus Christ, the Source, whom the Emperor historically worshipped once a year. This may indeed be a part of the picture, but it may be a dying metaphor, for it has not been performed for nearly one hundred years, though it remains embedded in the *habitus* of Vietnamese people. The

current government is attempting to re-invigorate, at least, the memory of this ceremony through a re-enactment of it at a festival held in the traditional capitol of Huế every year, but whether this will be successful is an unknown factor.

An epistemological shift from replacement theology to fulfilment theology requires a broad shift away from the top down approach. While a new hermeneutic would be very positive, the more pragmatic, bottom up approach of finding and experimenting with small improvisations, such as the ones recorded by the voices of contributors in this work, is more easily implemented. Churches in antiquity (Chapter Seven) obviously implemented such improvisations from their own backgrounds and either drew from indigenous forms and practices, or laid hold of available Jewish rituals and presentation, then changed them into Christocentric forms and kept that which was integrally part of their own culture. Simple improvisations utilized by local Christian communities may ultimately use a fulfilment approach, if VNEs recognize the enculturated traits of filiality as being planted in their hearts by God Himself.

8.4.1 The Sacrality of Remembrance: Looking to God as 'the Source'

Fulfilment theology is the key to understanding and improvising on the sacrality of remembrance identified as 'looking to the source' in Vietnamese culture. 'Looking to the source' has an unknown quality, leaving open the possibility of the question: 'who is the source?' with the obvious answer being that Ông Trời is the source. VNEs already see Him as the God of Christianity, called, Đức Chúa Trời. If 'looking to the source', that is, looking to Ông Trời, who is also Đức Chúa Trời, is applied, this nomenclature (Ma Tuoi, 2012) has great value as a didactic tool. It can be taught to children and commonly spoken of may be allow for more improvisations drawn directly from an indigenous theology, and is a contiguous bridge from Vietnamese culture to the historical message of the gospel. VNEs can easily make reference to 'God as the Source' in normal speech, lifestyle, habits, ritual and tradition, which may eventually lead to more formally crafted

theologies. Contributors such as Mr Bữu (C1-m9), have already intuitively made these cultural connections; connections which non-VNEs can quickly grasp due to the shared filial *habitus.* Born in a Christian home and separated from all indigenous ritual forms, he, nevertheless, interpreted the meaning of the LTT as 'looking to the source' for he immediately connected this ritual with the filial disposition common to all Vietnamese. VNEs, in the performance of the LTT, may combine a filial heart with a sacrality which looks beyond one's duty, seeing God as the source of life, not just as an ambiguous idea or concept, but that of Ông Trời*,* who is more clearly revealed as the God of Christianity (Đức Chúa Trời). This inscribed filial disposition from Mr Bữu's own culture enabled him to express the connection he makes with Đức Chúa Trời as he partook of the LTT.

In the performance of the LTT, VNEs appropriate *anamnesis* from their dispositions of filiality, and express the 'sacrality of remembrance directly to God, as One higher than remembered human ancestors. Their filial sense of duty and the filial relationship as a child (*con)* may be expressed toward God. While this is seen in inchoate form in the LTT, it may be expanded and discussed, dialogued and reflected upon overtly in Christian communities. While it is, in the LTT, at times, bound by the need to fulfil all duties in order to be in a state of holiness, which in many cases produces fear and condemnation, a more grace-filled understanding 'looking to the source', including forgiveness of sin and the qualities defined as *eucharisteo*, thanksgiving, (seen in early Eucharistic practices) may allow for VNEs sense of filial duty to expand to a greater revelation of the unconditional love and benefits God intends for each one.

In these ways, new improvisations should certainly be at least experimented with; some of these improvisations may have 'sticking power', that is, become innovative, thus allowing for genuine enculturated expressions which have the power to spread into a Vietnamese society heavily syncretized into Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. Yet this expression will look genuinely different: what was unknown (looking to the

ambiguous source) will no longer be an ambiguous unknown, but a looking to God, revealed in Jesus Christ (who was also the perfect filial son), and as was commanded by the Father, gave Himself for the salvation of the world. This is the kind of redeemed filiality that all Vietnamese may openly embrace. However, truth can only be embraced by those who can perceive it as truth. Drawing from the well of belief in the preciously held virtue of filiality and allowing it to be revealed, as 'Vietnamese-ness' in Christian expression, must surely speak to Vietnamese society and allow the understanding of the incarnate Christ. Recognition of the need for a redeemed filiality in expression and presentation of the LTT, that is, a grace-filled filiality, provides a means of veneration ritual in descending motion toward human family members and ancestors. Grace-filled filiality, while recognizing it as the 'debt that can never be re-paid' to Christ, also finds its true freedom in God's unconditional love. This could not fail to find a welcoming place within Vietnamese society, which prizes filiality as its central virtue, yet one elevated as worship of the One true God. VNEs need only recognize that God Himself meant these traits of filiality toward God and human elders to be planted into Vietnamese culture from its genesis as a provision for seeing God's work within a Vietnamese salvation history, one easily recognizable by all Vietnamese. This provides a natural enculturation bridge from culture to the historical message of Jesus Christ into the very centre of Vietnamese culture and provides a means of shifting away from a redemptive theology that views all pre-Christian cultural practices and beliefs as evil, or lacking in value. Allowing the development of a creational theology versus a purely conversion-based, or redemption theology allows VNEs to grasp that God is and has always been working in and through their culture. This ritual which speaks from the very heart of Christianity, needs to be reflected upon, dialogued through and given more overt expression among VNEs. It holds great potential for a Christocentric-cultural expression. The enculturated dispositions of filiality in the LTT can easily be enlarged upon and

expressed in more deliberate ways. Filiality as 'looking to the source' may and should be taught informally, as well as undertaken by Christian academia in seeking new Vietnamese theologies which explain redeemed filiality as a uniquely Vietnamese virtue and an expression of love first toward the divine (God), then as a more common virtue toward those who have given us life.

Hammersley tells us the 'purpose of ethnographic analysis is to produce sensitizing concepts and models that allow people to see events in new ways. The value of these models is to be judged by others in terms of how useful they find them'. (1990:15) The final stage of this project, and beyond the scope of this thesis, is to find out if this model is useful to VNE communities. While the space needed for an accurate ethnographic description has taken much of the allotted space, the only way to find out if the model detailed in this work is useful is to allow those contributing (VNE communities) to judge whether they are useful or not. As stated, without primary voices from the VNE communities, no model could have developed, for it was reliant on the VNE communities. It is now dependent on VNE communities to decide whether to and how to use a more heuristic method by examining enculturated traits such as filiality and other possible bridge building traits, linguistic forms, beliefs and practices which point from the unknown to the known, the revealed message of Jesus Christ.

While there is no evidence of transmutative enculturation into wider society is seen, these inchoate expressions, if seized upon by VNE communities, may have promising ways of demonstrating to general society that Christians are filial pietists, but with a difference: one's piety, as 'the debt that can never be re-paid' and as a 'looking to the source' is expressed first, toward God, then moving downward to express veneration, duty, love, honour and thanksgiving to those significant family members who preceded one, whether they were Christians or not, through veneration rituals which are obviously only to honour and venerate, not to worship. This allows for potential innovations through

the qualities of filiality into something new, a trait, (allowing for new inhabituations, which form new dispositions) and is inculcated with a redemptive, grace-filled duty, one done from the perspective of an unconditional love received. This has the means of not only pointing towards the Source (God) as with duty, honour and thanksgiving, but expresses a higher and more complete quality: a grace-filled freedom to respond back to God in love for all that He has done for us. It allows Vietnamese society, those beyond VNE communities, to recognize that which they already hold precious, but a more realized (versus idealized, or wishful) filial piety that may model God's grace to those outside the Kingdom of God. Beginning from such a principled, and grace-filled filial virtue, VNEs have the means of deciding (and realizing that they do have such agency) how to venerate and remember ancestors, whether to intercede for those who have gone before (and may never have heard the gospel message) thus bypassing the heartbreak of painful loss of one's family, and possibly one's entire lineage. This may be supported adequately from the Scripture itself, due to dynamic equivalent nomenclature and the inclusion of the term, *hiếu thảo.*

8.4.2 Doorways from the Scripture which Point to Filiality as a Christian Virtue

Chapter Three describes the term filial piety (*hiếu*) as used in the Fifth Commandment by translators, as well as the term *hiếu thảo* (1Timothy 5:4) which connotes a more pragmatic expression of one's filiality in mundane life. Greco-Roman culture of the first century also dealt with similar issues, and the domestic cult of ancestral worship. The word *hiếu thảo* is used to describe family duties toward elders, and translated from the Greek word, *eusebeio,* translated 'piety' (Towner 2006:339) in this passage and interpreted within the framework of values, duty, honour and responsibility toward family, and has possible correlations with a Vietnamese form of 'piety'. This also shows potential for the developing of local theologies. should be examined within the historical context of first century Mediterranean cultures. Such detailed historical research is

beyond the scope of this research, but subsequent research would do well to focus on how this common term, used frequently in the New Testament, was understood within Hellenistic culture and improvised upon by Paul in his writings. Even without such research, improvisations drawn directly and implemented directly from these verses can be a means of building positive understandings of filiality within Christian practices. New improvisations arising from the hermeneutic surrounding this term may be a means of bridge-building for the current generation of VNEs and non-VNEs in surrounding culture. The words *hiếu thảo* as well as *hiếu kính cha mẹ* should be used in improvisation didactically in the church, in household ritual and the teaching of children, and allowing extended families to promote ritual forms of Christian filial expression at home. VNE communities have already begun some focus on promoting simple filial remembrances in the churches, but these mainly focus on living parents, and very little is encouraged as practice within the family unit itself as part of a Christian lifestyle and Christian ritual practice. The authority of Scripture is for VNEs the locus of construct or orthodoxy and praxis: if it can be shown that through corelative concepts were woven into Scriptural language, such efficacious spiritual language allows for agency on their part. This also fits under a fulfilment theological approach, versus a replacement approach. If used pragmatically, such simple improvisations may give room for the development of 'allow[ing] people to see events in new ways'. (Hammersley 1990:15)

8.5 Agency and Improvisation

The understanding that improvisations should be seen as an authentic approach to linking enculturated traits and their underlying dispositions to those of general society needs to be taken seriously by Vietnamese leadership. Improvisations recorded in this work have been carefully and conscientiously implemented as a means of expressing one's faith in an orthodox and loving, sensitive manner**.** For example, Pastor ___(C2-7m) did not discourage the mother of Lạc from praying to Ông Trời, in asking forgiveness of sins. Mr

Đen, (C7-2m) interceded on behalf of his dead parents, asking, if possible, for their salvation, as they had never heard the gospel message. There were no practices recorded here which are outside the boundaries of orthodoxy of Evangelical doctrine, even seen from the point of view of a Western researcher-theologian such as myself (although it is possible that some VNEs leaders may oppose some of these improvisations on the basis of fear, as discussed in Chapter Five). Improvisations such as these can become material for evaluation and reflection by Christian communities if done with humility and a willingness to learn, whether done by laypersons or clergy. If new unregulated improvisations (Bourdieu 1977:77-80) are evaluated through the Scripture on a case-by-case basis in Christian communities, those considered genuinely orthodox may be positive, loving means of expressing a Christocentric filiality both toward God and toward those who have given one life. This is bound to have a positive impact in the surrounding general society.

8.5.1 The VNE Response to a Reified Eucharistic Event and the Need for Agency

Understanding the Eucharist as a complete dedication and participation with Jesus Christ even unto suffering and possible death is an accurate portrayal of what Jesus wanted His disciples to understand as they participated with Him in a meal that already contained a salvific narrative for them in terms of the Passover event in Exodus, particularly seen through the domestic ritual and emphasized through the bread and the sharing of one cup. However, the Eucharistic event, even for Western Christians, has become such an abstract, symbolic event to the extent that it is nearly unrecognizable. The minimalization of embodied practice, the lack of communal and familial meal, has in many Christian denominations, diminished it in meaning to an almost useless appendage.

This inherited reified form of the Eucharistic event taught and re-enacted faithfully by VNEs, is carefully preserved from the inherited mission structure of Evangelicalism. It is notable that VNE pastors rarely ever read one of these New

Testament accounts, but focus on the passage of 1 Corinthians 11: 22- 33 for context, and read this as a formal, almost a confessional form that must be followed in order to be worthy to partake. This symbolic act also enforces an acculturated epistemology of individualism on each participant during the confession of sin before partaking, which is only thought of in terms of the individual self, not the collective, the family or the community. The individualistic presentation of the Eucharistic event directs the participants away from the collective ethos in which the family and community receive mutual blessings (such as in the LDG). Individual expression is part of the LDG ritual, (in which individuals walk forward to light incense or bow before the altar) but its main expression is through the patriarchal elder or eldest son in which the entire lineage receives mutual benefit. If one examines the expression of the Last Supper ritual, one clearly sees that as one relies on Jesus (also described as the eldest Son), all receive mutual benefit. The collective partaking leads to a collective reception of the benefits of the shared ritual. The Evangelical presentation of the LTT, in this sense, has little by which the Vietnamese participant may grasp onto in terms of understanding its benefits. However, VNEs do recognize the LTT as a re-dedication of oneself to living a life 'fully surrendered to God 'and a starting anew by examining attitude and action. This mental re-dedication is a symbolic act giving oneself to Christ unreservedly.

If the LTT were not a reified ritual wrapped its original presentation, and VNEs had been free agents of change, allowing improvisation of this ritual, it might have looked quite different than its presentation seen today in VNE churches. Gradually, it could have become a truly Christocentric expression in Vietnamese culture of a domestic, communal ritual, one which allow the average Vietnamese person to see correlations with the sacral memorial of the LDG. As it is, little correlation can be found, even though both are rituals were originally instituted as domestic, memorial meals, similar in some respects, yet, radically opposite in other respects.

8.6 Conclusion

While little is seen in the world of missions in terms of understanding the need to practice cultural listening, to observe, reflect and exercise reflexivity in seeking primary voices in order to develop new models of seeing (Hammersley 1990:15), there are some signs of the understanding of the desperate need for this both from foreign missions, and from those mission churches across Eastern Asia in dealing with ancestral practice, for as shown in this research, previous methods have produced no permanent solutions. A few scholars have begun recently to grapple more concretely with these issues from the perspective of indigenous primary theologies emerging from these mission community, allowing such improvisations. For example, Dyrness quotes Smilde's research:

> Christians in these settings have found imaginative ways to respond to the challenges of their contexts. These Christians he says, express in their everyday cultural practices, a "creative agency". Conversion to Evangelicalism provides these believers with "a form of cultural agency through which they can gain control over aspects of their personal and social contexts. Smilde describes this creativity in what he terms a new "imaginative rationality." Significantly this method seeks to preserve both cultural autonomy and personal agency; that is, it allows the preservation of inherited cultural processes while encouraging fresh personal reflection … People [in such situations] encounter problems, create new projects to address them and then reflectively evaluate the success of those projects. (2016:465)

Here is a description of the processes of improvisation, seen in limited form by VNEs in this study. This 'imaginative rationality' also supports an enculturation model, for which primary voices + agency from the Christian community are a necessity. These primary voices may 'gain control over aspects of their personal and social contexts' finding freedom to address practices which are contrary to Scripture and speak to those issues and still 'allow the preservation of inherited cultural processes' as well as seek redemptive solutions to those same issues. This is reminiscent of Herskovits' definition of transmutative enculturation. (Herskovits 1949:641) Clearly, this creative rationality, or improvisation, from primary voices of VNEs shows the potential for development into local theology on a larger scale.

The goal of this research has been to clear the ground and open new possible channels for Evangelical Vietnamese churches to begin to assess the need for and to have the means of self-theologizing through primary voices and experimental improvisations.

Shining a spotlight on the embedded dispositions which express themselves within Vietnamese culture, through an enculturation model enables looking at if and how these traits intersect with adopted acculturations within Evangelical Christian beliefs and practices. With the development of improvisational approaches, epistemological shifts may emerge, allowing for the possibilities of new hermeneutic(s), which could be significant in aiding VNE communities. This research attempts to open a door to something more pragmatic and usable at a community level. Behaviours, actions, traditions and beliefs surrounding embodied practices particularly in regard to AV rites, as well as the LTT ritual, need to be observed and reflected upon by local communities.

The improvisations done by VNEs at an individual level have little means on their own of developing into practices which could eventually affect the 'structuring structures' of society. However, if Vietnamese Evangelicals collectively supported simple improvisations, and utilized these as a means within the *kerygma* of Evangelical churches, this could lead to, first, new practices within Evangelicalism, and second, the possibility of average Vietnamese people hearing the gospel message, with a realized perception of Ông Trời as the One who is the Source, but reaches into each life, forgives our sins (a quality never attributed to Ông Trời in Vietnamese traditional thinking). This would be an innovative move toward a new and salvific message of Ông Trời as the One true God of Christianity.

These three keys, shown through an enculturation model, agency in improvisation, (which allows communities to draw from their own inculcated dispositions), seeking out possible inculturation keys on filiality within Scripture, and focusing on fulfilment, versus replacement theologies in developing hermeneutics orthopraxy and in the mundane practices of life are all fertile means of allowing new epistemologies to emerge in VNE life and practice. It seems certain that without new 'ways of seeing' Evangelical churches of Vietnam will not experience dynamic growth

in the near future. Dyrness poses a critical question:

> Christians are likely to argue that Scriptures imply that … baptism and Eucharist (or Communion) are normative for all acceptable worship…These divinely stipulated practices may be important but they do not in themselves constitute a religious tradition…and they have been appropriated in widely different ways throughout the history of Western Christianity…Why do these elements need to be arranged in the same way that our Western post-Enlightenment heritage has decreed? ... If religious practices reflect cultural differences and geographical particularities, is it not possible that other arrangements of these elements, developed in other settings, might also facilitate a worship of God? (2016:2302)

This research argues that, yes, 'other arrangements of these elements' may certainly 'facilitate a worship of God'. Drawing upon VNE dispositions of filial piety there are avenues for local theology available to VNE communities that may lead to Christian enculturation. Vietnamese Christian communities must work out the 'nuts and bolts' of this at the ground level. This can only happen if these communities begin to 'find new ways of seeing' as Hammersley explains, along with the autonomy and willingness to implement new improvisations leading to innovations that allow for Christocentric-based, Vietnamese Evangelicalism.

APPENDIX A

Transcribers of Audio Note Interviews

These interviews were dictated, as noted in 2.6.1, into Audio Note software on IPad hardware. Two Vietnamese transcribers, Trang Collins and Phương Nguyên took on the job of listening to and transcribing each interview which was then copied and stored in NVivo 12 software, from 2016-2018. These two transcribers worked with me regularly as I went over wording, idiomatic expression and religious vocabulary which could seem obscure to readers who followed different religious practice. These variations in religious terminology occur between Buddhist, Catholic and Evangelical practice. If the transcriber has no experience beyond her own religious background, she may be unfamiliar with certain terminology, and this occurred in a few instances, however this was easily identified and re-worded. Trang Collins was particularly helpful, and spent many hours with me going over these transcriptions and explaining various expressions which seemed vague or were hard to hear on the audio. Phuong Nguyen, as a Roman Catholic, had difficulties when one contributor spoke in a demeaning manner about Mary and refused to translate a final paragraph. However, these difficulties were easily overcome. When the interviews were inserted into NVivo they were also gone over and decoded, thus allowing me intensive interaction with the transcribed texts.

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Invitation Letter

Kính gởi các vị Mục Sư, 8-23-2016

Xin gởi lời chào thân ái trong Chúa Cứu Thế Giê Xu. Xin cám ơn mọi người đã giúp đỡ công việc phỏng vấn của tôi cho cái bài luận án mà tôi đã làm trong thời gian từ 2015 đến 2016 .

Để hoàn thành luận án này, tôi trân trọng kính mời tất cả quí vị (những người đã góp phần vào công việc phỏng vấn cũng như những việc khác đến tham dự buổi Focus Group vào ngày 10, Tháng 12 năm 2016.

Địa chỉ:
HT Cơ Đốc Anh Giáo Việt Nam
650/13 Điện Biên Phủ , phường 11 , Quận 10.
MS Nguyễn Hồng Chi

Sẽ bắt đầu vào lúc 10:00 giờ sáng và kết thúc vào lúc 4:00 giờ chiều. Bửa ăn trưa sẽ được phục vụ tại nhà thờ '

Đó là một niềm vinh hạnh cho tôi được chia sẽ với tất cả quí vị về kết quả của luận án , và cũng để hỏi ý kiền các vị về kết quả này .Những ý kiến và đóng góp của quý vị liên quan đến sự thành tín trong đạo Tin Lành và cách mà người Tin Lành làm chứng cho các thành viên trong gia đình, sẽ có giá trị rất lớn trong việc tiếp tục luận án của tôi . Tôi cầu nguyện rằng những điều này cũng sẽ có giá trị đối với các vị về thần học trong thực tế va Giáo Hội học.

Cám ơn rất nhiều các vị dã giúp đỡ tôi và những vị sẽ tham dự vào ngày 16 tháng 12 '

Chân thành trong Đấng Christ,

Joni Wise
PhD Doctoral Student
Oxford Centre for Mission Studies,
Oxford, United Kingdom
joanmwise@gmail.com

English Translation Focus Group Invitation Letter

Dear Pastors, Aug 23, 2016

Greetings in our Lord Jesus Christ. Thanks to those of you who were willing to give an interview for my research during 2015-2016.

To finish off this research, I would like to invite all of you (those who contributed to the interview and others, also) to a Focus Group on December 16, 2016. It will take place at:

HT Cơ Dốc Anh Giáo Vietnam
650/13 Dien Bien Phu, p.11, Q.10
MS Nguyen Hong Chi

It will begin at 10:00 a.m. and end at 4:00 pm. Lunch will be provided at the church.
It would be a privilege to share with all of you some of the results from the research, and also to ask all of you to respond to some of these results. Your ideas and opinions regarding the Christian expression of filial piety and how Evangelicals express this to family members would be of the greatest value in continuing my research. I pray that this will also be of value to you in your theology in practice and ecclesiology.

Many thanks to those of you who participated, and those who will be participating on Dec. 16.

Sincerely in Christ,

Joni Wise
PhD Doctoral Student
Oxford Centre for Mission Studies,
Oxford, United Kingdom

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Some contributors are not listed by name, or did not give their full name, due to their concerns for privacy and security.

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C1-3f_(2015-02) Int 1 Phùng thị Quế Hồ Chí Minh City

C1-4m_(2015-02) Đặng Vũ Anh Kiệt Hồ Chí Minh City

C1-5f_(2015-02) Biện Thị Thành Trang Hồ Chí Minh City

C1-6m_(2015-04) Đặng Vũ Anh Chương Hồ Chí Minh City

C1-7f_(2015-04) Nguyễn Thi ảnh Thư (Chuong's girlfriend,) Hồ Chí Minh City

C1-8f_(2015-02) Nguyễn Hồng Ân, Hồ Chí Minh City

C1-9m_(2015-02) Ông Nguyễn Bữu, Hồ Chí Minh Cit

C1-10f _(2015-02) Hồng Trang, Hồ Chí Minh City

C1-11_(2015-03) Community Đình, Ông Sơn, Elder

C1-12m_ (2015-02) Ông Tâm Xuân Mỹ

C1-13m_ (2015-02) Ông Phan Mỹ

C1-14_Int 1_2015-02) PS ____ Hồ Chí Minh City

C1-14m_Int 2_(16-12-2016) PS___ Hồ Chí Minh City

C1-15m_ (2015-02) Father Phúc, Vĩnh Lòng Province

Location Two Hồ Chí Minh City and Long An Province

C2-1f_(2015-03) (2016-04) Int.1 &2 Nguyễn Thị Lạc, Hồ Chí Minh City

C2-2f_2015-03)_(2015-04) Int 1 &2 Truong_thi_Trung, Hồ Chí Minh City

C2-3m_(2015-03) Anh Nguyễn Nhân Ri, Hồ Chí Minh City

C2-4f_ (2015-03) Chi Nguyễn Mỹ , Hồ Chí Minh City

C2-5m_(2015-05) Pastor____, Hồ Chí Minh City

C2-6f_(2015-04) Female Pastor ____ Hồ Chí Minh City

C2-7m_(2015-05) Pastor___ Hồ Chí Minh City, see Truong_thi_Trung, Int 2, 2015

Location Three Hồ Chí Minh City

C3-1f_2015-01) Int_1, Int2 (2015-03) Ngô Thi Mai Hồ Chí Minh City

C3-2f_(2015-05) Ngô__ Tư (Chị Hai) Hồ Chí Minh City

C3-3m_(2015-04) Ngô Thanh Vân (Anh Hai) Hồ Chí Minh City

C3-4m, 4f _(2015-03) Ngô Van Tuấn,(husband), Hồ Chí Minh City

C3-5m_(2015-03) Loan (wife), Hồ Chí Minh City

C3-6f_(2015-03) Hạnh, sister-in-law of Ngô thị Mai Hồ Chí Minh City,

C3-7m_(2015-04) Pastor____ Hồ Chí Minh City

Location Four Lòng Thành City and Biến Hoa City

C4-1m_Int 1(2014-03) Int 2(2015-03) Int 3 (2016-12) Evangelist__ Lòng Thành City

C4-2f_(2015-03) Wife of Evangelist____ Lòng Thành City

C4-3f_(2015-03) Nguyễn Thảo, Lòng Thành City

C4-4f_(2014 -03) Nguyễn Đỗ Quyên, Lòng Thành City

C4-5f_(2014-03) Võ Thị Diệu Lòng Thành City

C4-6m_(2014-03) Ông Trung, Lòng Thành City

C4-7m, 8,f (2015-03) Nguyễn Lâm Thanh + Quý, (husband and wife) Lòng Thành City

C4-9f_(2015-03) Hung Thuy Lòng Thành City

C4-10f_(2016-12), Ông Nam Lòng Thành City

C4-11m_(2015-03), Female Pastor ____,Lòng Thành City

C4-12f_Int 1(2014-05) (Observation_2015-03) Cô Dung, Biến Hoa City

C4-13f_2015 Mother of Dung, Biến Hoa City

C4-14m_ (2015-3) Buddhist Monk, Bien Hoa Temple

C4-15m_(2015-04) Senior Pastor___Lòng Thành City

C4-16m_(2015-03) Pastor____Lòng Thành City

C4-17f_(2015-03) Cô Hàng, Lòng Thành City [audio lost, notes used from Journal 4,

2015-2016)

Location Five Mekong Delta Areas

C5-1f_Int 1 (2015-06) Int 2 (2019-11) Ngô Diễm Trang, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

C5-2f_2015-04) Chị Dương, Tân Bien Town, mother of Ngô Diễm Trang

C5-3m_(2015-04) Ngô Tiên Tùng (Anh Hai)

C5-4f_(2015-04) Chị Buổi Thị Út Gái, Tân Bien Town

C5-5f_(2015-04) Trần thị Sanh, Vĩnh Lòng Province

C5-6m_(2015-05) Tô Văn Cúc (Dương Nam), Vĩnh Lòng Province

C5-7f_(2015-05) Chị Trần Thị Diễm, Vĩnh Lòng Province

Location Six Kratie, Cambodia and Sóc Trang Province, Vietnam

C6-1f_(2015-04) Sambath Đen, Kratie Cambodia (ethnic Cambodian)

C6-2m_(2015-04) Ông Đen, Kratie, Cambodia (ethnic Cambodian)

C6-3f_(2015-04) Bà Đen Kratie, Cambodia (ethnic Cambodian)

C6-4f_(2015-04) Phalla Đen, Kratie, Cambodia (ethnic Cambodian)

C6-5m_(2015-04) Thông Đen, Kratie, Cambodia (ethnic Cambodian)

C6-6m_(2015-03) That Pe, Sóc Trang Vietnam (ethnic Cambodian)

C6-7m_(2015-03) Chua That Sóc Trang Vietnam (ethnic Cambodian)

C6-8m_(2015-03) Kim Luong Sóc Trang Vietnam (ethnic Cambodian)

C6-9m_(2015-03) Chat Cha Lat Sóc Trang Vietnam (ethnic Cambodian)

C6-10f, (2015-03) Chị Hoa Sóc Trang Vietnam (ethnic Cambodian)

C6-11m,f,_(2015-03) Anh Hai Đen, (husband) Chị Huế, (wife) Sóc Trang Province

Location Seven Hồ Chí Minh City

C7-1m_(2015-03) Pastor_____ Hồ Chí Minh City

C7-2f_(2015-03) Female Pastor____ Hồ Chí Minh City

C7-3m_(2015-06) Nguyễn Van Co, Hồ Chí Minh City

C7-4f_(2015-06) Cô Thủy, Hồ Chí Minh City

Location Eight Southern Vietnam

C8-1m_(2015-04) Para-church Bible Teacher____ Hồ Chí Minh City

C8-2m_(2015-05) Leader____ Hồ Chí Minh City

C8-3f _(2016-12) Mrs Hà Hồ Chí Minh City

C8-4m_Int 1 (2018-05) Int 2 (2019-11) Trương Tư, School Superintendent Đà Nãng City

Location Nine Random Areas

C9-1f_ (2016-10) Amber, Hồ Chí Minh City

C9-2m_(2016-10) Nguyên Đức Thế Hồ Chí Minh City (originally from Nình Bình Province)

C9-3f_(2016-10) Cô Loan, Kratie, Cambodia

Location Ten

C10-1m, author, Nguyễn Dung Thiên Ân, Luân Văn Tốt Nghiệp, [Dissertation], accessed 2015-03

Missionary Contributors

MC-1m_(2015-09) Reimer, Reg, Canada, emeritus

MC-2f_(2015-4) Elaine___ Hồ Chí Minh City

MC-3m_(2015-08) Irwin, Franklin, USA, emeritus

MC-4f, (2015-08) Douglas, Helen, USA, emeritus

Expatriate Vietnamese

CVK1f_(2015-06) Thanh Tazumi Campbell River, Vancouver, Canada[95]

CVK 2f_(2015-05) Cô Ly Phương, United States citizen living in Hồ Chí Minh City

CVK3f_(2015-10) CVK 3f Trúc Âu Kansas City Missouri

CVK4f_(2015-2017) Trang Collins, Merriam Kansas

[95] This contributor, an expatriate from North Vietnam, was not quoted and only used for comparison purposes, not in analysis and evaluation.

Focus Groups: (convened on 16 December 2016 in Hồ Chí Minh City)

Focus Group 1 Summary

Focus Group 2 Summary

Focus Group 3 Summary

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